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# JOURNALISM REVIEW

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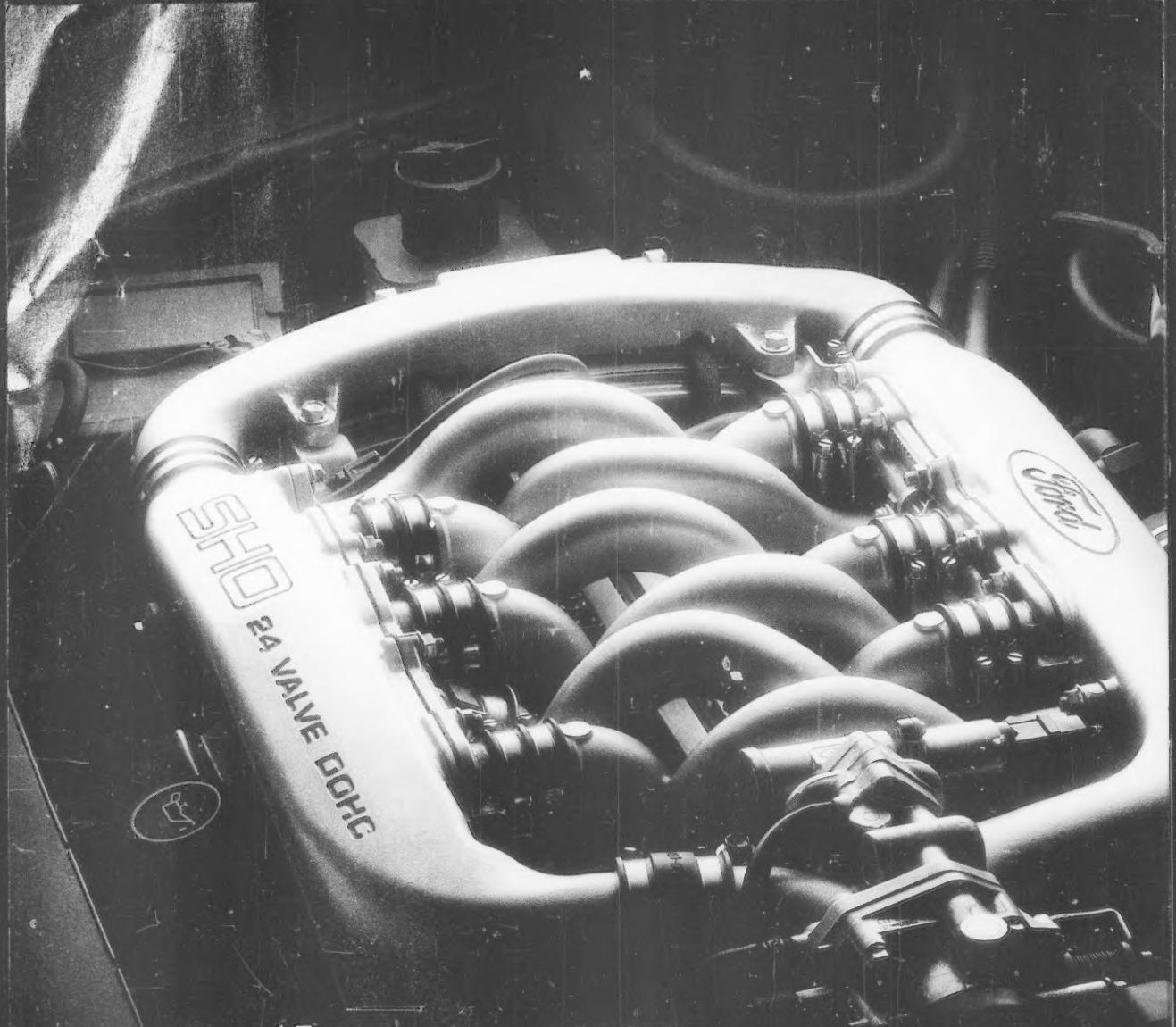
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# CHRONICLE

## A nest of Spys

Investigative reporting has reached new levels. Now we have *New York* magazine spying on *Spy*, the New York monthly, dogging its co-editor and co-founder E. Graydon Carter with cameras and beaverishly fact-checking his résumé, portraying him in a photograph as "a man unafraid to clean his nasal passageways on the subway," among other things.

The fact that *Spy* regularly refers to *New York*'s editor and publisher, Edward Kosner, as "publisher/society stooge Ed Kosner" may be relevant to this development. *Spy's* success may be a factor too; *Spy* (median subscriber household income \$66,800) surely competes for ads with *New York* (median etc. \$49,091). *New York* editors must also live with the suspicion that *Spy* is the magazine of the moment, while *New York* is the magazine of an ever-expanding number of moments ago. But magazines attacking magazines is really just part of the zeitgeist — a zeitgeist affected and reflected by the existence of *Spy*.

For those who don't know it, *Spy* is a humor magazine, kind of a serious one, known for its aristo-rebel voice, detailed reporting, social criticism, busy design, relentless irony, and frequent cruelty. "*Spy* is a small antidote to everything that feeds into the American public-relations turbine," says editor Carter. "We're a little propeller over

here in the corner, blowing the other way." *Spy* may not aid society's underdog, he says, but it "deflates the overdog."

It is hard to think of another magazine that would tackle the subject of *Spy*'s June cover story — people who have sold their souls to the devil (several journalists are mentioned, including Barbara Walters and Tony Schwartz, Donald Trump's co-author; also some publications, including . . . *New York*.) A photo feature in that issue — "My kid could do that" — tests the artistic abilities of children against the abstract masters of the day. Short features include a simulated interview with the prophet Muhammad on the Salman Rushdie affair, with questions by *Spy* and answers taken from the Koran, and a real interview with David Duke, the former Ku Klux Klan wizard turned Republican member of the Louisiana state legislature, whom *Spy* drolly dubs "the GOP's most exciting young leader."

*Spy's* regular feature on the inner life of *The New York Times* shows the magazine's willingness to skewer the powerful. It also shows its willingness to print vicious invective from the safety of a pseudonym — a recent item discussed the allegedly inadequate bathroom hand-washing habits of a *Times* editor. Still, without *Spy*, where would readers get their lick'n'stick Mikhail Gor-

bachev birthmark decal, their content analysis of Bob Greene's "predictable, meandering" *Chicago Tribune* columns plus an illustrated history of his hairline, their "separated at birth?" look-alike celebrity photos, or twelve pages of a "special *Spy* investigative tribute" to Ivana Trump, a piece that casts a shadow of doubt on the publicized version of her pre-Donald life as a top fashion model and Olympic skier.

Résumé enhancement, as it turns out, was one of the topics of *New York* magazine's April 17 article about *Spy*, conceived and written by David Blum, a *New York* contributing editor and occasional poker partner of E. Graydon Carter. Blum wrote that, when discussing his as-yet-unborn magazine with potential investors in the winter of 1985, Carter stretched or omitted a few personal facts. The article names *Spy's* alleged sacred cows and provides an enemies list, and it gives Carter a typical *Spy* treatment — documenting his workday, photographing even the "modest tip" (\$2.55) he and a colleague left after a deli lunch.

Although done in imitation of *Spy's* jaunty style, Blum attempted some serious points — that some of *Spy's* humor is mere name-calling, that it takes on some easy targets, and that, in general, *Spy* is not so bravely antiestablishment as it would like to believe. (Blum suggests that one investor bought his way onto the masthead, for example, and that *Spy's* decision to turn down a recent article proposal about the stiff requirements for getting into New York's very private Century Club was connected to the fact that Carter's co-editor, Kurt Andersen, had just been admitted.) Blum says he does find things to admire in *Spy*, but, he adds, "I think it's very, very difficult to cover this city the way *Spy* would like to cover it and to accept the kind of invitations and live the kind of life that the editors would like to live."

Wit is a serious instrument, and *Spy* has been critiqued in print before, most thoughtfully in *The Washington Monthly* and in *Dissent*. But Blum's piece seems to have gotten under the editors' skins. "I can't believe I'm going over this fucking thing again," says Carter, who claims that Blum's piece contains "fifteen errors," which he declines to

Yvonne Hemsey/Liaison

CJR/Harvey Wang

**Separated by mirth?**  
Spy editor E. Graydon Carter, left, got the pitiless Spy treatment himself in David Blum's perky-but-serious article in *New York*. Blum, right, paid a price, however.



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## CHRONICLE

list. He found it interesting that the piece appeared in "brave, edgy" *New York*, with its endless "summer this, summer that, what to eat, what to wear" coverage. "The only two pieces of any interest they had this year were about other magazines," he says, referring to Blum's *Spy* piece and a John Taylor article about *The New Yorker* and the Janet Malcolm/Joe McGinniss controversy (see page 21).

Andersen says that he and Carter, who first worked together at *Time*, envisioned *Spy* as neither a "self-conscious, at-the-barricades *Village Voice*" kind of publication or a "smarmy *Vanity Fair* cafe glossy," but "somewhere in between," an ambivalent insider/outsider stance he thinks helps to give *Spy* an edge. "There is a risk," Andersen says. "If we got too close to the establishment, too close to the people we should be pillorying, it would be bad. You can only judge by the magazine. When we start being a toothless, softy sort of magazine, I'll agree we've lost our edge."

Okay. Speaking of sharp edges, *Spy* seems to have upped its quota of unfavorable references to *New York*, if the June issue is any indication. Blum, meanwhile, has learned that it is difficult to get in the last smirk on *Spy*. Shortly after his article appeared, *New York*'s publicist received a call from someone who invited the author to discuss his article about *Spy* on a metropolitan-area television talk show, *People Are Talking*. At the appointed hour a limousine arrived, complete with an inquisitive and friendly driver, who took Blum from Manhattan to the studios of WWOR-TV, in Secaucus, New Jersey — some five miles across the Hudson River — and left. "The guy shows up," says David Sittenfeld, a *People Are Talking* producer. "We didn't know why. He didn't know why. It was very funny." WWOR-TV was kind enough to send Blum home in its own car. Later, Blum would learn that the first driver, apparently a *Spy* operative, had taped their en-route conversation, presumably in hopes of further embarrassing him. A snippet of the transcript later appeared in *New York Newsday's* gossip section.

Blum says that a phone number left with the *New York* publicist was a *Spy* number. Carter and Andersen deny any knowledge of the incident, somewhat unconvincingly. "Whoever did this probably broke all kinds of statutes," Andersen explains. Blum says that, for a few days after the incident, his phone-answering machine was filled with the sound of giggles.

Michael Hoyt

Michael Hoyt is an associate editor at the Review.



CJR/Patrick McDonnell

## L. A. breakdown

They didn't mind so much when the roof leaked or a cold day brought out hand-operated heaters on overturned trash barrels. But when their computers swallowed interview notes, jumbled their stories, and finally went down for more than an hour the night of the 1988 presidential election, employees at the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* said "enough."

"It's like the *Gaslight* treatment," says medical reporter Faye Fiore. "It slowly drives you crazy."

Yet Fiore and other reporters say they love working at the perennially profitless *Herald*. Aggressive local and investigative reporting make it a scrappy 238,000-circulation competitor to the 1.1 million-circulation *Los Angeles Times*. It often beats the *Times*, in fact, most recently with a story about Los Angeles mayor Tom Bradley's controversial connections to the Far East National Bank. "If you have a good idea, the editors let you run with it," says environmental reporter Alina Tugend. But reporters, writing on computers that crash up to ten times a day for paychecks they consider inadequate, wonder why the paper's owner, the Hearst Corporation, is not willing to give them the resources they need to compete. Other employees do, too.

So with a contract covering some 550 workers about to expire in March, the *Herald Examiner's* union negotiating team asked Hearst not only for better wages and benefits — the demands included raises large enough to bring salaries closer to those earned by employees at Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner* — but also for a modern computer system and other equipment.

The *Herald Examiner* loses more than \$1 million a month, according to union activists (company officials would not talk about earnings), and many editorial and business side employees believe the paper needs a lot more than new equipment. As they see it, the *Herald* ought to go tabloid, carving out a market niche quite distinct from the *Times's*. Hearst has circulated several tabloid prototypes but has yet to make the switch.

Lee Guitar, a Hearst vice-president, denies that the corporation has neglected the *Herald Examiner* — "We've invested plenty in the paper over the years," he says — and he bristles at the idea of employees making investment demands. Investment policy, he says, flows from "a management decision process." Employees have not been in the mood for such sermons, however. During the recent negotiations, reporters, pressmen, mailers, truckers, janitors, and members of the advertising staff donned T-shirts reading "We Work at the *Herald Examiner* and Nothing Else Does."

On March 1 — four days before the contract expired — almost all the reporters took a "lunch break" right before deadline, while classified advertising salespeople suddenly were able to take only one ad per hour instead of the usual ten to fifteen. The paper's presses managed to break down thirty-seven times that night, and several newspaper delivery trucks seemed to get lost on their regular routes the next morning.

Many militants came to believe that the *Herald Examiner's* union, Graphic Communications Union Local 388M, was not pushing hard enough (a charge the union den-

# A 1908 law pits railroad employer against worker in a costly game of chance. A change in the rules is overdue.

For most American workers, a job-related injury means workers' compensation—"no-fault" recovery, guaranteed benefits and rehabilitation.

But not for injured railroad workers.

They come under a 1908 law, the Federal Employers' Liability Act (FELA). FELA guarantees nothing. An employee with a slick lawyer might win big. Or an employee might get nothing—despite a crippling disability.

FELA works that way because it was enacted before state workers' compensation systems were put into place.

For instance, FELA doesn't provide for rehabilitation. In fact, rehabilitation is discouraged because it could hurt an employee's chances with a jury. Modern compensation systems stress helping the injured worker to become productive again.

And don't let anybody tell you that big awards under

FELA promote safety. The reverse is true. Winning or losing depends upon who is found to be at fault—FELA rewards the placing of blame, not the improvement of safety.

FELA is expensive, too. Between 1981 and 1988, employee injuries dropped by almost half—but FELA costs doubled. The tab now tops a billion dollars a year, taking more than 3 cents out of every gross revenue dollar paid by railroad shippers and consumers. FELA amounts to a hidden tax on rail shipments.

## Who likes FELA?

A small group of specialized lawyers like FELA—a lot. When you collect between 25 and 40 percent of a big settlement, you can afford a few losses. In 1988, alone, FELA was worth an estimated \$170 million in fees.

## FELA should be repealed.

In 1908, FELA was a good idea. But the past 80 years have seen better ideas come along, namely, no-fault workers' compensation. Today, this legal dinosaur is unfair to injury victims, inhibits rail safety efforts, and siphons off dollars that could be used to improve safety and service. A change is long overdue. For more information, write: FELA, Dept. CJR-B, Association of American Railroads, 50 F Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001.



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ies). Some of them even waved Milkbone dog biscuits at union representatives during a raucous contract ratification meeting on March 7, to underscore their rallying cry, "Throw the bone back" to management. After six hours the contract, a mixed bag that included improvements, was approved, by a five-vote margin.

Hearst made no promises to invest in the paper. Reporters were told that the board of directors had decided at a March 29 meeting to invest \$2.6 million in a new computer system—a decision that management claims had been in the pipeline before the staff began demanding it. But a top company official

soon told union activists that the decision had been put on hold.

Hearst, it seems, has decided to cut its losses. In April the *Toronto Sun* and oilman Marvin Davis each expressed interest in buying the *Herald Examiner*, but both reportedly backed out. In May the paper's chief operating executive, John J. McCabe, announced plans to lead a group of *Herald Examiner* executives in a buyout of the paper, which he said he would turn into a tabloid. Then in late May, reporters learned that Hearst had retained the investment banking firm Lazard Frères and Company to help sell the paper, while *Herald Examiner* managers and em-

ployees formed a "committee for a greater Los Angeles newspaper" to support the management-led buyout.

Reporters remain wary. Whether McCabe can raise the money is unclear; so is the role employees and their union would have in the buyout. Still, "A lot of people are talking about hanging in here as long as they can," says reporter Fiore. "If we didn't love this place, we'd be out of here. But we don't want to see this become a one-paper town."

*Kathy Shenko Seal*

*Kathy Shenko Seal* is a free-lance writer who lives in Santa Monica.

## The magazine that wouldn't die

Freedom of the press is a right closely associated with the French Revolution. But as France celebrates the bicentennial of that upheaval this summer, at least one magazine in Paris is wearing fresh battle scars. *El-Badil* has been banned seven times since 1986.

The government's harassment of the monthly, published by émigrés opposed to the one-party government in Algiers, is a curious affair. It involves France's diplomatic self-interest, the status of its immigrants, and some surprising limits to press freedom in the land of the Declaration of the Rights of Man. (The Declaration, a source of French law, affirms the right of citizens to "speak, write, and publish freely.")

The French may fret about issues like concentration of media ownership or regulation of the airwaves, but everyone agrees that its press is largely unfettered. Yet the French government has the authority to ban any book or periodical "of foreign origin." Even material published in France by French citizens is not exempted if the Interior Ministry deems it to be foreign-inspired. This power, which was added to France's press code on the eve of World War II, has provoked little controversy because its victims have been obscure and few in number. If it were ever used to shut, say, the Paris-based *International Herald Tribune*, it would become notorious overnight. (According to Charles L. Robertson's history of that paper, a minister in Charles DeGaulle's government threatened to do just that during a tense period in Franco-American relations in the 1960s.)

*El-Badil* may not be the *Herald Tribune*, but it is no crude, extremist rag either. Founded in 1982 as the French-language organ of the Movement for Democracy in Algeria (MDA), it is a thick, glossy, and well-designed magazine of news and opinion. *El-*

*Badil* focuses on Algeria, but it also covers the vast immigrant community in France, as well as Middle East politics, superpower relations, and cultural affairs. The tone is serious, if partisan. According to editor Mohamed Beneladj, the journal has a staff of thirty, including clandestine correspondents in Algeria, and a circulation of 15,000.

The troubles for *El-Badil* began in 1986, a year in which the French were caught up in Middle East violence. Nine French citizens were held as hostages in Lebanon during the year, while a series of Paris bombings, most of them linked to a terrorist cell from Lebanon, killed thirteen people and wounded more than 100. In October, the Jacques Chirac government rounded up thirteen

### 'Keeping your allies happy does not qualify as a legitimate ground for muzzling free speech.'

MDA activists, including two journalists with *El-Badil*, and moved to expel them under a new antiterrorism law.

These actions were indeed a response to terrorism, but, as some French journalists pointed out, not in the way the government wanted people to believe. The detainees, long-time residents of France, were under no suspicion of violent activities. As *Le Monde* reported, the expulsions were "a good-will measure" toward the government of Algeria, which had been serving France as an intermediary, both with the hostage-takers in Lebanon as well as with the Lebanese terrorist cell that was wreaking havoc in Paris. The

crackdown on the MDA, which is led by former Algerian president Ahmed Ben Bella, was welcomed by the current president, Chadli Benjedid. Although the group posed no immediate threat to his rule, its criticisms, which filtered into Algeria through underground sales of *El-Badil* and other means, were an irritant to a government accustomed to minimal public dissent.

But the expulsions never took place, thanks to extensive coverage in *Le Monde* and *Liberation* and an impressive protest campaign. The Ministry of Interior, however, promptly found another way to show its gratitude to Algeria: the banning of the MDA's magazine. The decree came in December 1986. "In the current context," it said, "the publication, distribution, and sale of the magazine *El-Badil* undermines the diplomatic interests of France." The December issue, which had just appeared, was no doubt particularly offensive to Algiers, since it featured articles on the attempted expulsions, corruption in the Algerian government, and the November disturbances that had hit several Algerian cities, the country's worst unrest in years.

The closure attracted little public attention. (A notable exception was an ad in *Le Monde*, signed by some 180 writers and personalities from various countries, protesting the ban.) When *El-Badil* appealed the ban, the ministry testified that the magazine advocated the overthrow of a friendly government. *El-Badil* replied that it favored a pluralist democracy, achieved through nonviolent means. But the court, which is prevented by law from scrutinizing the ministry's reasons, ruled that the ministry had acted within its powers.

The staff did not take long to recover. In March 1987, Beneladj and his colleagues launched a magazine called *L'Alternative Démocratique*. But it too was outlawed on the ground that it was a reprise of *El-Badil*. Over the next sixteen months, five more in-



# “Sex education classes in our public schools are promoting incest.”

America has always been blessed with characters who claim to have all the answers.

The problem is, they don't always practice what they preach. And hypocrisy can be extremely harmful.

Take leading “pro-lifers,” for example.

They want the government to outlaw abortion for every woman, even in the case of rape or incest.

Yet prohibition has never stopped abortion. It has only made terminating a pregnancy dangerous for the poor. And more expensive for the better-off.

“Pro-lifer” leaders claim they're ready to stop abortion by any means necessary.

Yet they violently oppose proven ways

to avert abortion, like effective family planning programs and sex education that addresses young people's real-life problems and concerns.

According to Jimmy Swaggart, “Sex education classes in our public schools are promoting incest.” While according to Phyllis Schlafly, “Sex education is a principal cause of teenage pregnancy.”

Of course, enforcing ignorance and preventing young people from making safe, responsible decisions will only result in more unintended pregnancies and more abortions.

In fact, the “pro-lifers” couldn't do more to increase the number of abortions if they tried – while they push for measures

that actually threaten women's lives.

Make time to save your right to choose. Before the “pro-lifers” start making your choices for you.

---

**Take action!** To join Planned Parenthood's Campaign to Keep Abortion Safe and Legal, please mail this coupon to: PPFA, 810 Seventh Ave., New York, NY 10019-5818.

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**Don't wait until women are dying again.**

carnations of *El-Badil* were banned after their first issue. In the last instance, in July 1988, the newly elected Socialist government performed the honors. French officials justified that ban by citing international law permitting restraints on expression for reasons of national security; anticensorship groups maintain that keeping your allies happy does not qualify as a legitimate national-security ground for muzzling speech.

The systematic harassment of *El-Badil* is unprecedented in recent years. To understand it, one must appreciate French attitudes toward Algeria, which mix guilt over the colonial past (especially the vicious eight-year war to keep Algeria French) with admiration, particularly on the left, for independent Algeria's role as a third world leader. Algeria is also an export market of great potential, a producer of oil and natural gas, and a key ally in France's Middle East diplomacy.

As a consequence, the French have been indulgent toward the excesses of Algeria's "revolutionary" regime. And they have also let their own government muzzle Algerian dissidents to an extent they would not have tolerated if the victims had been, say, Poles.

In November 1988, this double standard was finally confronted head-on. As the world watched in horror, the Algerian government used tanks and live ammunition to suppress the worst unrest since independence, killing 500 to 1,000 youths over six days. In France, after a few days of stunned silence, politicians and intellectuals began denouncing the repression in Algeria as well as their fellow citizens who had hesitated to speak out.

For *El-Badil*, the October uprising may have been a turning point, as the French discovered that popular discontent in Algeria ran deep, and that it derived partly from the lack of pluralism and free expression. Launched again the following month as *La Tribune d'Octobre*, the magazine has been allowed to appear regularly ever since. Editor Benelhadj says that an official of the Interior Ministry told him informally the magazine would not be banned again.

As for Algeria, with President Chadli's recent pledges of a democratic opening, Benelhadj even hopes that *La Tribune* will eventually be permitted to circulate openly in that country. Beyond Algeria there are more frontiers: the magazine is banned everywhere in the Arab world. But Benelhadj is taking one step at a time. He is optimistic that France, two hundred years after the office of the royal censor was abolished, may finally let him publish in peace.

*Eric Goldstein*

*Eric Goldstein is a former associate at the Committee to Protect Journalists.*

Jack Spratt/Picture Group



*What do the kids who deliver the Providence Journal-Bulletin want? More. Left to right: Daisy, Eamon Shelton, Ryan Harrigan, Patrick Shelton, and Neil Pires.*

## Labor and delivery

Anyone who has ever tried to toss a newspaper from a moving bicycle knows that working a paper route does not quite live up to its Norman Rockwell image. As competition has dwindled, daily newspapers have gotten fatter and heavier. On rainy days they often arrive late and get wet in transit. Customers are as likely to complain as they are to tip. "I don't recommend it to anybody, unless conditions get better," says Providence *Journal-Bulletin* deliverer Eamon Shelton, age nine.

Two years ago, Shelton and his older brothers — Patrick, twelve, and Jimmy, fourteen — set out to improve their lot by forming the Rhode Island Carriers Association. After one meeting with the group in March 1987, *Journal-Bulletin* managers agreed to supply plastic bags on rainy Sundays, and to print an apology when papers arrive late. But when the fourteen-member association tried to arrange a second meeting to discuss other grievances, their calls and letters were not returned. By this June, although the paper had granted a 17 percent raise (to seven cents per weekday paper and twenty-six cents on Sundays), its managers had still refused to meet. "They're in the communications business and they won't talk," says the boys' father, Henry Shelton,

a community activist who encouraged his sons to organize. "If any politician would do that, they would roast him."

Several of the carriers, their parents, and sympathetic representatives of several unions held a rally in front of the *Journal-Bulletin*'s office in downtown Providence on April 19. The carriers who spoke at the rally complained that they must foot the bill for their canvas delivery bags, collection books, rubber bands, and liability insurance, and that they must arrange for their own substitutes when they take a vacation. They want another raise, to help cover their losses when they are stiffed by nonpaying customers, and they want to attach a service charge to prepaid subscriptions, which the *Journal-Bulletin* has been pushing lately and which cuts into the carriers' tips.

But their top demand is that the *Journal-Bulletin*, which currently offers a total of \$12,000 in scholarships to seven carriers annually, match *The Boston Globe* by providing scholarships of up to \$5,000 for every carrier who completes three years of service. "The scholarship is the main thing," says Neil Pires, ten, "because it will help kids go to college."

The newspaper maintains that because the carriers are self-employed, their collective

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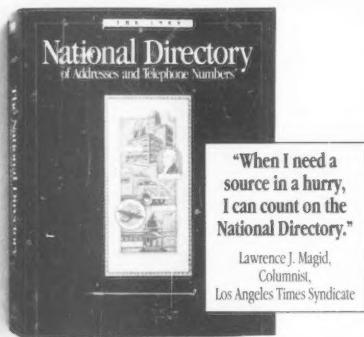
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## CHRONICLE

demands are inappropriate. When the carriers tried to take out an ad outlining their grievances in April, the *Journal-Bulletin* first accepted, then returned, their check. On the news side, the association has been mentioned five times in the pages of the *Journal-Bulletin* since it was formed, including six paragraphs the day after the rally.

Thanks to television and radio coverage, the carriers have attracted backers, including the Rhode Island Parent-Teachers Association and the state senate, both of which

strongly recommended that *Journal-Bulletin* management meet with the carriers. Bernard Singleton, the director of Rhode Island's Department of Labor, wrote a letter to the *Journal-Bulletin*'s management offering to mediate between the newspaper and the deliverers. So far, no reply.

*Leslie Whitaker and Laurence Zuckerman*

*Leslie Whitaker is a reporter for Time magazine and Laurence Zuckerman is a staff writer for Time.*

## Just curious?

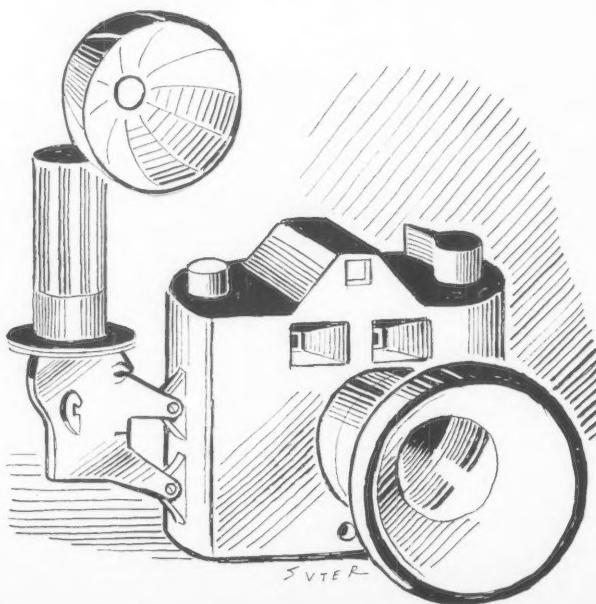
Twice a week a middle-aged woman walks into Bettmann Newsphotos on East 21st Street in Manhattan and walks out with at least a couple of dozen photos from the files of the agency's foreign-based photographers. Her boss, Mary Beth MacDonald, makes similar visits to Gamma Liaison and, less frequently, to JB Pictures and Sygma. What they do with all these pictures is starting to make at least a few photojournalists nervous.

MacDonald works for the Graphics Service of the U.S. State Department. She says she's looking for "personality" photos — world leaders and new presidents, for example — and photos of such things as demonstrations and military parades. The photos are then sent to Washington, she adds, where they are used in the State Department's magazine *State*, and also for reference purposes and White House briefings. "We've been

dealing with photo agencies since the 1950s," MacDonald says.

"We let them do their thing," says a Bettmann Newsphotos employee. "They make a special round; they have a special arrangement." In return, Bettmann regularly receives \$750 a month. According to the employee, the Graphics Service usually takes sixty photographs a week — most recently from China, Russia, Morocco, France, Lebanon, Poland, and Afghanistan — from the UPI and Reuters wires, which Bettmann manages. At JB Pictures Ltd., on the other hand, founder and owner Jocelyne Benzakine recalls having sold just "three or four slides of portraits of political leaders" since the State Department became a client last fall.

Although this sort of arrangement is nothing new, many foreign-based photographers don't know about it. Jeremy Big-



CJR David Suter

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Complete entry requirements are contained in the awards brochure and official submission form which will be available in September 1989. For copies, write to:

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**General Motors Cancer Research Foundation**

## CHRONICLE

wood, a photojournalist who has been covering Latin America since 1984, learned about it on his last trip to the U.S., in October.

Bigwood says he has been wary ever since a friend, a well-connected diplomat in Honduras, warned him somewhat cryptically to "watch your photos." In October he came to Gamma Liaison and "noticed that all my work had been checked out for a research fee by the U.S. State Department." Bigwood, who sends three or more thirty-six-shot rolls of exposed film to the agency each week, featured that, in the wrong hands, some of those pictures could "put my life and others in jeopardy." Only when he complained to Gamma Liaison did he learn that he could stipulate "no State Department use" on his pictures. The very next day, he says, "I was told that when the woman from the State Department arrived at Gamma Liaison, she was informed that she would no longer have access to my work."

Bigwood's worries are similar to those of another photojournalist based in El Salvador, one who did not want to be identified in print and one who, like Bigwood, sometimes photographs people whom El Salvador's security forces might perceive as suspect.

"You don't know what this is for; it could be a form of intelligence gathering," the pho-

tographer says, adding that there are many links between the U.S. government and El Salvador's security forces. The United States funds and helps set up training for leaders of El Salvador's armed forces, for example.

El Salvador's army and security forces, of course, have been connected to the country's

**'You don't know what  
this is for.  
It could be a form of  
intelligence-gathering.'**

notorious assassination teams. In 1984, Amnesty International concluded that these death squads were "made up of regular police and military personnel, often operating in plain clothes but under the orders of superior officers." The human rights organization quoted Salvadoran and U.S. embassy sources who said that names, personal details, and sometimes photographs of those selected for death were passed on to army officers, who then assembled squads of killers. (The report did not make clear who passed on the informa-

tion and photographs to the army officers.) In a 1988 special report on El Salvador, Amnesty International said that death squad activity, which had declined after 1984, had escalated during 1987 and 1988.

Some photographers don't see much of a problem. Cindy Karp, who has worked in Central America for seven years, suggests that photographers censor their work before filing slides abroad. In her own case, she says, she leaves the decision up to the individual being photographed. "For example, if you are taking a picture of a rebel, he's showing you what he wants to show the whole world. If he doesn't want to be photographed he'll take his own precautions."

MacDonald says she gets some requests for specific photos (she would not say who in the State Department makes such requests), but that most of the pictures she chooses are "my guesswork of what they would be interested in — for example, a picture of Gorbachev at the U.N." She says she gets few requests for pictures from El Salvador. The photographers' fears are "silly" but "understandable, I suppose," she says. "We all fear the government."

*Athena Vorillas*

*Athena Vorillas recently completed an internship at the Review.*

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# OPINION

## The slasher, the speaker, and *The Washington Post*

*The shadowy profile of Pamela Small that ran in The Washington Post.*

by KEN BODE

*Thursday evening, sweeps week. Pamela's Story, a made-for-TV movie.*

*Opening scene: Two old friends are sharing a drink after a black-tie press dinner in Washington. He is an editor in his late forties; she, in her early thirties, works in p.r. They had met at The Washington Post, his newspaper, where she once worked. He had commented on her beauty and a colleague had said, "Wo...I you believe that some psycho attacked her with a hammer?" (This part is a flashback, one of several in Pamela's Story.)*

*The dress she is wearing is black, scoop-necked, cut low. Even in the half-light of the bar, her companion notices the scar on her neck and asks how it happened. "The guy who attacked me," she replies, "he cut my throat."*

Until May 4, when *The Washington Post* ran a 4,000-word Style piece called "Memory and Anger: A Victim's Story," Pamela Small's side of the story had never been told, at least not in print. Now it has, and John Mack — the man who clubbed and slashed her to near death sixteen years ago, then rose to a powerful insider position with the speaker of the House on Capitol Hill — has quit his job, left town, and, in all probability, changed his name. His benefactor, Jim Wright, in trouble of his own before Pamela Small told her story, also has cut his losses and quit.

The way the story was handled raises questions that promise to surface in journalism seminars for a long time.

First, was it news? How much of the story already was known, had already

*Ken Bode is the director of the Center for Contemporary Media at De Pauw University. He was formerly national political correspondent for NBC.*

been reported? That John Mack was a convicted felon was widely known on Capitol Hill, although the details of his crime were not. In a column defending the *Post's* coverage, its ombudsman, Richard Harwood, suggested that cozy relations between the press and politicians on Capitol Hill had kept the story out of print. The tale, he wrote, had been "ignored — is 'suppressed' too strong a word? — for more than two years by leading journalists in the congressional press galleries."

Suppressed? Around the time Jim Wright succeeded Tip O'Neill as speaker in January 1987, anonymous letters began circulating on the Hill calling John Mack, then a top aide to Wright, a "violent criminal." Some of the letters were typed on congressional stationery and included fourteen-year old clips detailing the assault on Pamela Small.

Many reporters knew about the letters and passed the story on to their editors, but there was little interest in following up. One reporter who did follow up was David Montgomery, Washington bureau chief of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. Montgomery interviewed Speaker Wright, John Mack, the sheriff of Fairfax County, Virginia (where the crime was perpetrated and where Mack served his time), the chief investigator in the case, and the chief jailer. He also interviewed Pamela Small for four hours, agreeing to her request that her identity be withheld.

Montgomery's August 2, 1987, story recounted the random assault — Mack, the nineteen-year-old manager of a furniture store; Small, an unwary customer led to a storeroom — at least as fully and graphically as newspapers ordinarily do in such cases — hammer blows to the head which exposed parts of the skull, slashes with a knife on the neck



Margaret Thomas/The Washington Post

and breast, the victim left in her own car in danger of bleeding to death. The story, which ran about 3,000 words, recounted Mack's arrest, confession, guilty plea, the record of his incarceration and circumstances of his parole. It was a fully reported story, but told mostly from the point of view of Mack, stressing his rehabilitation.

At the same time Montgomery was preparing his story, Wright's press aides were briefing many Capitol reporters on Mack's background, spinning the story to stress his rehabilitation. Among the organizations that knew of the letters and the pending *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* story were the *Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and NBC News. None considered it newsworthy. At the *Post*, then managing editor Leonard Downie made the decision; two years later Downie reversed himself and approved Pamela Small's story for the paper's Style section.

Apart from the fact that he covered Washington from the point of view of Jim Wright's hometown, what did David Montgomery see in this story that others did not? "What if something happened again?" Montgomery responds. "Then the press would be blamed for knowing about Mack and not reporting it."

Montgomery's story was picked up by four newspapers in Texas and California. An AP wire story also ran at the time. A year later the conservative Liberty Lobby ran an item in one of its pamphlets detailing the crime and billing the story as "Mack the Knife." In June 1988, on CBS's *Face the Nation*, Cap-

## OPINION

itol Hill reporter Phil Jones queried Speaker Jim Wright about a member of his staff, "a man who bludgeoned a woman back in the 1970s with a hammer. He left her for dead. He was convicted of this, sent to prison, was later released to his brother. And his brother happened to be your son-in-law at the time. And you hired that man and he is now working on the taxpayers' payroll making almost \$90,000 a year?"

In short, it is hard to see how anyone can argue that the story was suppressed.

Ken Ringle, the *Post* editor who wrote the story, says Pamela Small did not particularly like the Fort Worth account. He is in a position to know; he and Small have been friends since 1973. At the time of the attack, Small was working at the *Post* as a part-time tour guide; later, she worked there as a copy aide. After leaving the paper in 1977, she remained in occasional contact with Ringle — lunch a couple of times a year, dinner now and then, and periodic phone calls when Small, who worked in public relations, was flacking a story.

None of this was mentioned in the May 4th story that went out to 264 domestic users of the *Post's* news service. Should it have been? Of course. When a friend writes a story about another friend, it's up to the reader — not the newspaper — to judge whether the relationship is important.

A second question has to do with timing: Was this an old story, dragged out by the *Post* and run at just the time it could do maximum damage to the speaker of the House?

Like so many things in Washington, how you see this one depends on where you sit. Many in the congressional press galleries, members of Congress, and some *Post* reporters believe this was a classic case of "piling on" — that Wright's troubles gave Pamela Small's story a peg it otherwise didn't have. "We ran the story when we got the story," Mary Hadar, assistant managing editor of the *Post* told *The New York Times*. "I can certainly see no reason to hold the story because it comes at an unfortunate time for Jim Wright." But remember, the *Post* had been offered the story in 1987.

Perhaps the most revealing assess-

ment is offered by Ken Ringle: "Congress was following the wrong things on Wright. They were worried about his wife's video when there was a slice-and-dice guy on his payroll. Pam wanted her story told. She felt this is not the way the system is supposed to work."

Finally, did the *Post* allow itself to be used? More specifically, was Pamela Small using her connections at the *Post* — at the time of Jim Wright's greatest vulnerability — to square accounts with John Mack? To many, the twenty-seven months Mack actually served in a county jail seem to have been too little; also, in the public backwash of the story, much was made of the fact that he had never apologized to Small, never made restitution for her medical bills. Ringle says that revenge was not the motive: "Pamela and her family are not 'hang 'em high' people. On the other hand, she was getting increasingly angry. She told me, 'Wright's employing this near murderer, and I'm afraid to go to Capitol Hill.' "

**T**hose who condone the *Post's* resurrection of an old story do so on the ground that Pamela Small allowed her name and photograph to be used for the first time. But the *Post* also took extraordinary steps to accommodate her and protect its exclusive: to avoid what Ringle calls "a TV feeding frenzy" it waited until she had obtained an unlisted phone number, and the photograph published was a shadowy profile that purposely made identification impossible — a non-picture, in effect.

Inside the *Post*, the Pamela Small story was read by editors from many sections of the paper before it was approved to run as the lead feature in Style. Opinion divided by sex: men were reluctant to dredge up an old story, chary about its timing; women argued strongly that it should run.

When the story ran — one hesitates to say "broke" — it proved to be a consciousness-raising episode all over town. Three congresswomen — Lynn Martin, Pat Schroeder, and Olympia J. Snowe — took action that speeded Mack's resignation. At NBC, Washington bureau chief Tim Russert decided not to report the *Post* story, but did bring it up for discussion at the regular morning

meeting; women favored pursuing the story, men were skeptical. One woman who knew of Mack's background admitted that whenever she encountered him alone in a hallway she went out of her way to avoid passing close by. This writer was asked, bluntly, by his wife: "If one of your daughters worked on Capitol Hill and faced the possibility of riding in an elevator to the parking lot at night with John Mack, wouldn't you want her to know enough to make an intelligent choice?"

There were many such discussions. But Paul Taylor, one of the *Post's* leading political reporters and the father of a daughter, best summed up the question of the squaring of accounts. "Vengeance was clear in the story. John Mack had paid every debt to society, but he had not squared his accounts with Pamela Small. We went in with our eyes open. The *Post* was the willing vehicle for her to exercise her vengeance." Taylor believes the story should have run.

The *Post* story had powerful human interest appeal, as indicated by the broad, avid readership it achieved and the ripples that passed through letter columns and call-in talk shows. But it was not, strictly speaking, news, a fact the *Post* implicitly acknowledged by carrying it in its Style section. As "soft news," the story could have run any time; if it were going to run at all, it should have done so two years ago, when all the pertinent facts were the same: Jim Wright was speaker and John Mack was his top aide. By running it when it did and claiming indifference to its political repercussions, the *Post* compounded its earlier mistake. The Pamela Small story caused a greater erosion of Jim Wright's public and political support than did any of the sixty-nine violations alleged by the ethics committee. As speaker of the House, his fate should have been decided exclusively on the merits of the case against him. It was not.

The *Reader's Digest* will republish Pamela's story in August. Already there have been four TV-movie feelers, one for a book, and invitations from Koppel and Donahue to go on television.

You may have seen the end of John Mack, but not of Pamela Small. ■

# DARTS & LAURELS

by GLORIA COOPER

**DART** to *The Anchorage Times*, for pouring editorial oil on Alaska's troubled waters. In the wake of the catastrophic spill by the *Exxon Valdez* in Prince William Sound, the paper produced a series of unctuous editorials aimed at containing "the noisy, acrimonious public response" and "the fury" of the environmentalists ("This is precisely what some of these groups have been waiting for and hoping for all these long years"). Stressing the need to "keep everything in perspective," "to temper the magnitude" of the disaster, and "to play it cool," the *Times* made its primary loyalties crystal clear: the "almost incalculable" cost of the calamity, in the paper's view, was "the damage done to the industry with respect to the public relations aspects of the environmental harm and to the political havoc that will follow" — not to mention "those intangible losses associated with what surely now will be long delays in [Alaska's] plans and hopes for future oil development . . . ."

**LAUREL** to Gannett News Service and *USA Today*, for "The S & L Mess," a profitable examination of the folly, fraud, and regulatory fumbles that over the years have added up to the savings and loan industry's current \$100 billion crisis. Replete with graphics, charts, sidebars, and a computer-assisted analysis of the financial health of each of the nation's 3,046 savings and loan institutions, the series represented an exemplary investment of classic *USA Today* techniques.

**DART** to *The Winnipeg Sun* and editor-in-chief Bryan Dunlop, for endangered news judgment. Designating the upcoming visit of two giant pandas as being "among the top news stories this year," Dunlop in a March 20 memo exhorted "every member of the editorial department to make as much of the event as possible . . . ." Included in Dunlop's pandanic plan: a twice-weekly "Panda Report" (on Fridays, "in the forward news hole"), two major articles for the Sunday magazine, six panda supplements (of souvenir quality), and the incorporation of a panda into "The Panda Paper's" front-page flag. Not coincidentally, perhaps, the president of the Winnipeg Zoological Society and chairman of the panda committee — one Al Davies — also is publisher of *The Winnipeg Sun*.

**DART** to the San Antonio, Texas, *Express-News*, for a

Gloria Cooper, the Review's managing editor, has been writing the Darts and Laurels column since 1976.

case of dateline envy. Although the paper's front-page stories on the sensational shoot-out by the Matamoros cult bore the on-the-spot dateline of MEXICO CITY, the reporter whose byline appeared on the stories had in fact been at home on the range. According to a May 10 item in the rival *San Antonio Light*, *Express-News*'s early edition, accurately enough, had omitted any mention of its reporter's whereabouts; but upon discovering that the competition's reporter was actually on the scene — and filing (legitimately) datelined stories — *Express-News* editors bit the ethical dust. "I told them not to do it," the embarrassed reporter, Dino Chiechi, was quoted as telling the *Light*. "Maybe," the *Light* wondered in obvious glee, "it was the influence of a bizarre Circulation Cult?"

**DART** to Linda Ellerbee, for a less than inspiring example of enterprising journalism. The CNN commentator and syndicated columnist can now be seen on all three networks with daily reports about viewers' preferences for Maxwell House coffee. Ellerbee may also be found in the editorial pages of the May *Vanity Fair*, where, trading in on her familiar signature "And so it goes," she reports on her highly favorable impressions of the 1989 Cadillac after test-driving, at Cadillac's invitation, two top-of-the-line Fleetwood Six Specials, one on each coast. Apparently the title of the piece, "And So It Went," was not intended to refer to Ellerbee's credibility.



**LAUREL** to the *San Diego Tribune* and staff writers Linda Keene and David Hasemyer, for "Death in the Jail," an unfettered inquiry into the barely noticed deaths of the eighty-two men and women, many of them pretrial detainees, who have died in custody since Sheriff John Duffy took office in 1971. Seven months in the making and based on documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act and the California Public Records Act, as well as on more than 200 interviews with inmates, lawyers, doctors, and penal experts, the series revealed that, contrary to public perception, the leading cause of jail fatalities is neither in-

mate violence nor suicide, but, rather, illness and medical neglect. The series also pointed up the disturbing lack of interest in investigating the deaths on the part of the district attorney and the coroner, both of whom rely almost entirely on accounts supplied by Duffy's deputies — thus, in effect, allowing the sheriff's department to police itself.

**LAUREL** to the *Wisconsin State Journal* and reporter Joyce Dehll, of Madison, and the *Goettinger Tageblatt* and reporter Ulf Goettges, of Goettingen, West Germany, for a unique effort that dramatized the vital interconnections between people living in two communities half a world apart. The jointly published six-part series described, among other things, how Wisconsin's forests have benefited from West Germany's discoveries about acid rain; how the fluctuating dollar affects such local businesses as a Goettingen exporter of high-precision scales and a Madison exporter of milking machines; and how, following the example of West Germany's Green party, the Wisconsin Greens are gearing up to organize statewide.

**DART** to the Newark, New Jersey, *Star-Ledger*, for the grotesque Grundyism in an otherwise sensible editorial on Abbie Hoffman's death. Assessing the role of his counter-

culture movement in criticizing hypocrisy and forcing a reevaluation of American ideals — among them, freedom of speech — the editorial recalled that among the radical activist's more notable books was one entitled *Revolution for the Heck of It*.



**DART** to Wally Hall, sportswriter for the Little Rock, Arkansas, *Democrat*, for demonstrating how a journalist's reach can exceed his grasp. Back home again after covering the NCAA Final Four basketball playoffs in Seattle, Hall considered the relative merits of that city as a potential site for future events and found it decidedly wanting. "Coaches were given bus rides from the airport to their hotel, thrown lavish parties, and generally received the red carpet treatment," Hall observed in an April 6 piece, while "the media caught cabs, paid inflated prices for dinners, and were virtually ignored. Of the eight consecutive Final Fours I've been to," Hall grumbled, "this was the first city to not throw a bash for the media on Sunday night featuring their special foods."

**DART** to the *Spokesman-Review/Spokane Chronicle* of Spokane, Washington. The paper recently received a first-place award from the Society of Professional Journalists for

general excellence in its region — but its handling of the story called into question the wisdom of the judges' choice. Although more than 100 column-inches were given over to what appeared to be a detailed and exhaustive rundown of the first-, second-, and third-place winners (as well as the honorable mentions) in each of the contest's 148 separate categories, the list was less than complete. Mysteriously omitted were six awards to the Kalispell, Montana, *Daily Inter Lake*, and fifteen more to the Missoula, Montana, *Missoulian*. Possible explanation: both the *Inter Lake* and the *Missoulian* serve a circulation area in which the *Spokesman-Review* competes.

**LAUREL** to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and reporter Tim Novak. On routine assignment last December to cover the annual luncheon at which the highly successful St. Louis Variety Club — described by its telethon chairman as "The United Way for children's charities" — was handing out its grants, Novak asked a club official for a list of the recipients and the amounts that each had received; when the officials refused, the surprised reporter took another route. From IRS records obtained through the FOIA, Novak learned that, contrary to law, the tax-exempt club had not supplied such information to the federal government since 1984. With the March 11 telethon fast approaching and club officials continuing to stall, the paper on March 2 ran a page-one story on the curious secrecy of the club; on the following day its officers released a list of allocations for 1988. They also promised to file amended past returns with the IRS.

**DART** to Jim Barnhart, sports columnist for the Normal, Illinois, *Normalite*, for forgetting the rules of the game. When his friend Bob Donewald was suddenly fired from his job as basketball coach at ISU, Barnhart used a full-court press in Donewald's defense. Barnhart not only spent countless column inches cheerleading for the coach and faulting the university for its unfortunate decision; he also arranged for Donewald to meet with the press, helped him prepare a statement, and then took part in the press conference by tossing a sympathetic question at his friend.

**DART** to Gannett's *Florida Today*, daddy of *USA Today*, for its self-caricaturing coverage of Allen H. Neuharth's retirement as chairman of Gannett. Besides the two lengthy pieces that began on page one (headed NEUHARTH STEPS DOWN AND NEW CHALLENGES AHEAD FOR TODAY FOUNDER), the fulsome April 2 package presented three related articles (NEUHARTH REDEFINES RETIREMENT; LEGEND BEGINS WITH BIRTH OF TODAY; FOUNDER MAKES HEADLINES WITH SHOWMAN SPIRIT); a Q & A (PLAIN TALK FROM THE RETIRING CHAIRMAN) that plugged the chairman's book; a graphic depiction of Gannett's TWENTY-SIX YEARS OF SUCCESS; thirteen QUOTES OF NOTE about Al; a twenty-inch Neuharth TIMELINE documenting the landmarks of his life (not excluding his two divorces); and eight photos of Neuharth at work and at play. ■



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# JOHN SWETT AWARDS

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The John Swett Awards are named for the founder of the California Teachers Association, who was also the state's fourth superintendent of public instruction. The Awards honor individual journalists, newspapers, journals and broadcast stations for outstanding coverage of public education issues. Nominations for the awards are made by local CTA affiliates, but the judging of the entries is done by a panel of professional journalists.

## INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

**Deborah Anderluh**  
Los Angeles Herald Examiner  
**Angie Cannon**  
San Francisco Chronicle  
**Peter Schrag**  
Sacramento Bee  
**Gina De Paola**  
The Sun, San Bernardino

**Jud Snyder**  
Rohnert Park-Cotati Clarion  
**Dan Borsuk**  
San Francisco Progress  
**Julie Tilsner**  
Palo Alto Weekly  
**Andy Friedman**  
KFBK-AM, Sacramento

## MEDIA AWARDS

The Sun, San Bernardino  
(two Swett awards)  
The Daily Press, Torrance  
Belvedere Citizen, Los Angeles  
KXTV-Channel 10, Sacramento



nea national education association

Ed Foglia, President    Ralph J. Flynn, Executive Director    Ned Hopkins, Director, Information and Development

# DANGEROUS LIAISONS

Journalists and their sources

Interviews by MARTIN GOTTLIEB

Few articles on the subject of journalism have triggered more newsroom and cocktail-party debate, more belligerent editorializing, and more honest soul-searching than Janet Malcolm's *New Yorker* series called "Reflections: The Journalist and The Murderer." The articles, appearing last March 13 and 20, focused on the relationship between Joe McGinniss, author of the nonfiction bestseller *Fatal Vision*, and his subject and business partner, Jeffrey MacDonald, an ex-Green Beret who was convicted of murdering his wife and two daughters.

But Malcolm went beyond the particulars to make the case that all journalism, by its nature, is "morally indefensible." In her memorable lead she describes the journalist as "a kind of confidence man, preying on people's vanity, ignorance, or loneliness, gaining their trust and betraying them without remorse."

To many journalists, these assertions seemed simply ridiculous. Yet it seems unlikely that they would have reacted as they did — often furiously — had there not been some truth in what Malcolm wrote.

No hard and fast rules define the relationship that should, ideally, be maintained between a journalist and a source. Most journalists have, accordingly, worked out their own rules. Over the years, writers like James Agee, Tom Wolfe, and Joan Didion have provided impetus for journalistic self-questioning; none of these writers, however, attacked the craft of journalism in such a vigorous and sweeping — and, in the view of many, overly broad — fashion as Malcolm.

Malcolm's articles, and also the unusual nature of the McGinniss-MacDonald relationship, raise some specific questions: Should McGinniss have entered into a business partnership with a controversial figure whose story he

sought to tell — and, indeed, should any journalist enter into such a relationship? Did MacDonald's subsequent lawsuit against McGinniss, by compelling the author to reveal his state of mind while writing, constitute a dangerous new threat to First Amendment rights? Was McGinniss's behavior in writing sympathetic letters to MacDonald while preparing a devastating book about him morally defensible? Were William Buckley and Joseph Wambaugh correct when, in testifying at the McGinniss-MacDonald trial, they stated that it is accepted journalistic practice to either imply agreement or overtly agree with a subject's assertions in order to keep him talking — even when the journalist privately disagrees with those opinions?

One question raised — but not addressed — by Malcolm's article was: Should she have disclosed her own legal battle with Jeffrey Masson, the subject of a *New Yorker* profile who accused her of deceptions in some ways similar to those MacDonald claimed McGinniss practiced on him, and of fabricating quotes that were injurious to him?

In an attempt to focus on Malcolm's essential charge, the Review asked a number of prominent journalists — including Malcolm and McGinniss, who declined to be interviewed — whether they had qualms about their work, whether they thought their attempts to elicit information from subjects and sources could fairly be called "seduction," and whether Malcolm's charge that journalists betray their subjects was legitimate. While these taped and condensed responses occasionally veer away from the questions, they are, we believe, enlightening.

Martin Gottlieb is Gannett Visiting Professor at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism. Gottlieb has been editor-in-chief of *The Village Voice* and a reporter at *The New York Times*, *The New York Daily News* and *The Record* of Hackensack, New Jersey.

**'In journalism your loyalty is to the truth as you perceive it, not necessarily to your subject'**

## KEN AULETTA

When I am doing a book and I hope to see a person many times in the course of several years, I don't, on the first meeting, ask my most charged questions. In the first five minutes of my first interview, I do not confront the subject. I will ask softer questions. Because I am trying to get the subject to relax, just as you do with someone you are interviewing for a job, right? That's the nature of human intercourse, so it seems a legitimate act of seduction, if you want to call it that. And I think Malcolm rightly calls it that.

To move from "seduction" to "betrayal," the question arises, How do you determine whether the subject was betrayed? And here key questions are, Did you say anything to the source to mislead him into thinking you were sympathetic? Did you figuratively lie, steal, or cheat? It seems to me there's a difference between expressions of support



and simply nodding when the source makes what he thinks is an interesting point. But it also seems to me that there are some lines responsible journalists don't cross. We don't give advice to people we write about. We don't say, "I agree with you." We don't suggest people they might hire. We don't ask them for favors.

It is natural for a source or subject to feel betrayed when the story comes out and the subject doesn't like everything in it. But that doesn't mean the accusation of betrayal is justified. In journalism your loyalty is to the truth as you perceive it, not necessarily to your subject. Forgetting that is exactly the failure of insider journalism.

When I wrote a profile of Mayor Koch for *The New Yorker* in 1979, Koch felt "betrayed" by the piece. We went through this whole argument and my side of it was this: "Yes, I did spend nine months with you and, yes, I laughed at your jokes and, yes, I went to lunch a lot with you — it was Dutch treat — and, yes, you allowed me to read your mail and, yes, you allowed me to read your phone messages. But you always knew — or should have known — that when I got to the typewriter I was going to forget about you in one sense, and that can seem a brutal thing to do."

In this sense, Janet Malcolm has a point: journalism can be ruthless and brutal. And though there are no codified journalistic rules of conduct there are commonly accepted values. If that were not so we wouldn't deserve to call ourselves a profession.

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*Ken Auletta is a columnist for the New York Daily News and the author of Greed and Glory on Wall Street.*

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Thomas Victor



**'The world is full of people who honestly don't know that journalists are not their friends'**

## NORA EPHRON

What Janet Malcolm was saying was so reasonable I was astonished anyone took issue with it. Joan Didion wrote twenty years ago that a writer is always selling someone out. This was exactly what I knew to be true about journalism, and I felt the same way about Janet's pieces.

I believe that to be a good journalist you have to be willing to complete the transaction Janet describes as betrayal. Do you always have to betray someone to write a piece? On some level, yes. A profile has got to be written from your point of view, not from the subject's. Part of what you are trying to do as a journalist when you are writing about other

people is to sort of wave at the readers through whatever you're writing about; you are trying to get them to notice you, the writer, to notice your way of looking at things, to notice your own peculiar, particular voice. So even if you are just talking about a minor betrayal, you have to do that — you have to make the material your own. And there is no question but that you have to have a certain lust for blood to do this. Some of the best journalism I've read happened after what Janet is describing as a "betrayal" or as "immoral."

One of my friends who was disturbed by the points in Janet Malcolm's pieces said she worried that if people read them, they wouldn't give interviews to journalists. I don't see anything wrong with this. The world is full of people who honestly don't know that journalists are not their friends. They honestly have no idea how awful it is to be misquoted or to be quoted out of context or to have what they said quoted but used to make a point they never intended — all of which, I'm sorry to say, is standard operating procedure among the majority of journalists. So if people read Janet's pieces on Joe McGinniss and Jeffrey MacDonald and learn to be wary of journalists, they've learned a valuable lesson.

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*Nora Ephron is a screenwriter and the author of Heartburn, among other books.*

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**'Early on we used a variety of techniques, among them the famed, notorious — or whatever — ambush interview'**

## MIKE WALLACE

As a journalist you do some role playing. You don't turn all your cards face up. But let me give you a real-life example. I had a telephone conversation this morning with a prosecuting attorney. We know from some records that we obtained that the background of one of his major contributors is questionable — to put it euphemistically.

Now this prosecutor has told the producer of our piece that he has "consulted the Lord" and decided not to participate. I have never talked to him, so I call and say, "Look, the producer and I are working separately on this," which is true. "I have information from one side, he has information from the other side, and let me tell you what some of that information is." Then, in a friendly, straightforward way, I let him know a couple of the things that we know, thinking that may persuade him. Finally, though, I failed, so we are just going to do without his appearance.

What I'm trying to say is that you certainly don't come on hard when you are trying to persuade somebody who is reluctant to come on the broadcast. On the other hand, there are times when you'll say, "Look, you'd better do this. It's in your own damn self-interest to do this," because you believe that approach will be more effective.

In a sense it's pointless to try to make distinctions between seduction and persuasion or urging or whatever. In each case what you're trying to do is to get cooperation. And as long as it's done honestly, as long as no promises are made which are then broken, then it seems to me perfectly reasonable to quote sell unquote the object of your scrutiny on the wisdom of cooperation.

Early on in the development of *60 Minutes* we used a variety of techniques, among them the famed, notorious — or whatever — ambush interview. It was only when every other means failed and we wanted to get the person on camera that we resorted to the ambush. It generated a certain amount of drama. But after a while it became obvious that it was self-conscious drama, that you could do just as well by saying on camera that we had sent telegrams and got no response.

The kind of people we talk to are, by and large, people who are not unused to public colloquy, and they often have public relations people to advise them. I find that more and more public relations people, particularly the younger crowd, are suggesting to their clients that the most useful thing that they can do — once they've been properly coached by their media advisers — is to come on and put the best face they can on whatever it is that we are talking about.

*Mike Wallace is senior correspondent for CBS News's 60 Minutes.*

Eddie Adams/Sygma



## J. ANTHONY LUKAS

There can scarcely be a reporter, a writer, an editor, or, for that matter, a reader, in America who is not arrested by Malcolm's startling opening sentence. I must say, however, that the beginning seems to me a profoundly silly one.

I am certainly not denying that reporters do their share of manipulation. Of course they do. But the relationship is *mutually* manipulative. And that's because human relationships are mutually manipulative. We all manipulate each other: husbands manipulate wives, wives manipulate husbands, friends manipulate friends. I mean life is complicated, after all. And therefore the relationship between a source and reporter is complicated and Malcolm thunderously oversimplifies it.

In my experience, the relationship between reporter and source, particularly one of long term, is filled with collaboration and manipulation, with affection and distrust, with a yearning for communion and a yearning to flee.

Malcolm's opening sentence, arresting though it may be, is utterly without necessary distinctions. Many newspaper reporters spend their lives largely reporting the doings of more or less public figures who are quite sophisticated about the press — and who manipulate the press as much as they are in turn manipulated.

The road to advancement in American journalism is, it seems to me, inexorably a road that involves covering politics. You may start covering city hall and crown your career by covering the White House. Well, in that world I think Malcolm's sweeping statement is utterly *not* true. It is very much more likely to be the man in power who is manipulating the reporter.

Some years ago when I was doing two full issues of *The New York Times Magazine* on Watergate, I got an interview with Elliot Richardson. He was out of office at the time, so he received me, very shrewdly, at his northern Virginia home — a lovely, rambling old farmhouse — and it was winter, as I recall, and he seated us in front of a roaring fire. There were beautiful prints on the wall and it was, oh, just very cozy and pleasant. And seated across from me was this enormously handsome, articulate man who had recently come through the "Saturday night massacre" looking very heroic indeed. And about halfway through this interview I remember thinking to myself, He likes me. Elliot Richardson likes me. And he trusts me and he is speaking to me not as a subordinate, not as a mere reporter, but as a literate

**'It is very much more likely to be the man in power who is manipulating the reporter'**



Nancy Crampton

and perceptive man who can understand. He probably can't talk this way to most Washington reporters. He is really opening up to me.

It wasn't until I was in the cab on my way back to Washington that I thought, Schmuck, you've been had. You've just been treated to the treatment that this guy is exceptionally good at, and you fell for it — and may have taken a little sting off some of your questions in return.

This isn't to say that I wasn't trying to manipulate Elliot Richardson; I was. I was trying to get information out of him which he didn't want to give me.

I think that one would certainly have to say that, when one moves on to the nonpublic person, Malcolm's opening assertion is somewhat more on target. There are subjects/sources who know very little about the way the press works and they are therefore subject to a kind of seduction.

But, by and large, in the seven and a half years I spent writing *Common Ground* [a book about three Boston families and the ways they were affected by Boston's school desegregation plan], I did not have to use my seducer's skills to get my subjects to talk to me. They wanted to talk to me for reasons of their own, often very complex.

I devised with them, and with Knopf, a technique which I freely admit is unorthodox and which may strike some reporters or some editors as not justified. I devised releases in which they promised not to sue me for invasion of privacy and, in a couple of cases, not to sue me for libel, and, in the cases where they wouldn't agree not to sue for libel, they agreed not to sue me for libel except on specific items which were identified prior to publication. They were given the right to read the chapters about themselves, not the entire book, prior to publication. Further, they were invited to identify not only those points they felt were libelous but any verifiable matter of fact they thought was inaccurate.

With regard to matters of interpretation, the release said, You may argue with me and I will listen — as long as you fully understand that I make no promise to make changes. And, finally, there was a paragraph that explicitly said, You are going to have all these interviews with me, most of them are going to be on tape, you can withdraw nothing. One family did urge me to withdraw material and, on reflection, I declined to do so.

But the fact of the matter is that the three families did not feel I seduced and betrayed them. On my birthday following the publication of the book they gave me a party.

Although this was my story, my vision of what happened in Boston, I think I went to considerable lengths to make sure that the members of these three families were treated in such a way that they would recognize themselves. And I think that Malcolm does me and many of my colleagues a great disservice to suggest that we are cynical and manipulative.

There is one rather important point I wish Malcolm had explored at greater length, which is that a source has to face up to the fact that the journalist who seemed so friendly and sympathetic, so remarkably attuned to the source's vision of things, never had the slightest intention of collaborating with him; that the journalist always intended to write a story of his own. I think that is true.

When I went to Boston I set out to in effect cast my book as if I were a theatrical director. I was looking for a black family, an Irish family, and a Yankee family who would play almost theatrical roles in my drama — and it was my drama. Are we, to use Malcolm's words, appropriating their lives for our stories? Yes, we are. And does that raise problems? Yes, it does. And does the craft of literary non-fiction, with all its excitement and the wonderful books that it has produced, create problems? Yes, it does.

But I would say, with due respect to Malcolm, that we ought not to be turning this into a question of moral culpability. We are, I think, honest craftsmen by and large, working at an evolving craft, trying to tell our stories, and if we make mistakes it is not moral culpability we are talking about, but mistakes — sometimes serious ones — that are the mistakes of craftsmen.

J. Anthony Lukas is the author of *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families*, and has won two Pulitzer Prizes.

'I think  
the seducer  
is the one  
who is  
doing  
the talking'

## JOSEPH WAMBAUGH



Those ivory-tower arguments of Malcolm's were just so much crap to me. That opening sentence just blew me away. If anything, I think many of the people I have interviewed as a policeman and as a journalist were trying to con me all the time. I never felt that I was conning anybody.

It is hard to con a con, you know, and the folks I dealt with as a cop were cons themselves. So I felt it was my job to keep from getting conned. And I think reporters feel the same way. I mean, after all, when they write about people aren't those people trying to be seen in their best light? Don't they want reporters to love them? Don't they want reporters to report them in a way that they see themselves?

So I think that the seducer is the one who is doing the talking. In testifying on journalistic procedure at the McGinniss-MacDonald trial, my point was that there is something between truth and lie, as we all know. I don't think Malcolm quoted me fairly. I think that because large

portions of my testimony were not quoted, she didn't fairly convey my meaning or what I was talking about.

As a journalist, I would say you don't lie to anybody. You don't lie to anybody in life, why would you lie to people you are interviewing? But are there times in life when I don't tell the exact truth? If my wife comes home and says, "How do you like my new dress that just cost five-hundred dollars?" — that sort of thing. As I said in my testimony, you go to a thirty-year reunion and everybody is saying things that aren't true. But nobody is lying. There is a hell of a difference. My idea of a lie is an untruth that is told with ill will, malice, or bad intent, or that is uttered with knowledge that it could harm the person.

Another thing absent from her article: I was limiting my testimony as an expert witness to my dealings in life as a policeman and as an author with sociopathic killers, who will manipulate you. I was trained as an investigator to interview this kind of person — the most heinous kind of horrendous person. And when one of these people who has just raped a defenseless woman says to the investigator, "You know what you feel like sometimes, you get this urge and they ask for it, don't they?" you react a certain way. You are trying to get this guy to confess so you can put the bastard behind bars so he can't rape anybody else. I was trained that you are supposed to say something like, "Oh sure, Charlie, I know how you feel. Jesus, I mean I can't quit smoking and drinking. How can I criticize you?"

Malcolm quoted me as testifying that even though I didn't believe one of the murderers in *The Onion Field*, I said I did when he asked me if I agreed that he didn't shoot the police officer. I don't know if I said the word "said" or if a court reporter wrote down "said" or if Malcolm misquoted me. But if I had to be precisely correct now as a result of this debate I would say I would *imply* understanding. I would say to the guy something noncommittal, something like, "Well, I haven't really thought it all out completely." That is no more true than it is not true because obviously I had come to a conclusion.

But is it a lie? If it's a lie, tell me where there is malice, ill will, or bad intent.

I am limiting this to dealing with sociopathic murderers. I am not talking about my interviews with victims, witnesses, or ordinary people. I am talking specifically about a Jeffrey MacDonald who must manipulate his interviewer as he must manipulate everyone in his life. At those precise moments I think it is fair play to give him a vague and noncommittal answer which is not exactly the truth.

I think Joe McGinniss's behavior was very unusual. It was very unusual to have that sort of an arrangement with MacDonald. I would never give anyone a percentage of my royalties, I don't care who it was. To me that sort of taints a relationship to begin with. But, on the other hand, Joe was very naive about sociopaths. I, on the other hand, am not naive about people like that and I know how their m.o. works, and I would never ever get involved in a relationship with one of them or one who could be such a person by the very nature of what he is being accused of.

*Joseph Wambaugh is the author of novels and nonfiction books.*



*McGinniss and MacDonald during MacDonald's murder trial.*

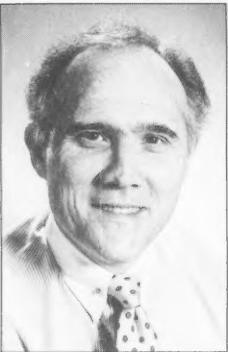
## JOE MCGINNIS

The sense of obligation I felt toward Jeffrey MacDonald changed at the point where I discovered he had been lying to me, trying to manipulate me, trying to use me to tell a false story. For many months after that jury verdict in his case, while intellectually I found myself persuaded he was guilty, emotionally I found myself unable to accept that. And during that period of — well, ambivalence is too mild a word — of real conflict, I tried hard to give him the benefit of every doubt that I could, and did indeed behave toward him in compassionate fashion without, however, telling him that the book I was going to write would say this or this or this. I didn't know what the book would say, so there would be no way I could make a promise to anyone about what the book would ultimately say.

I think that as you proceed with any extended writing project, your understanding of your subject deepens, broadens, intensifies, or evaporates. Something happens. It's not a static process and therefore the personal concomitant to this professional relationship also goes through a variety of modulations, and I don't think that a writer should ever be bound in his finished work to reflect an opinion that he might have held three years earlier. . . . The only control the subject has is the right to say no to begin with. If you don't want to be written about, just say no and then the writer goes away. . . . [The] project is in the sole editorial control of the person doing the interviewing and once that understanding is established as the basis for the relationship, whatever personal relationship grows out of it is . . . secondary. It just doesn't matter in the end. In the end, the obligation of the writer, be it a newspaper writer, a magazine writer, or a book writer, is to his or her own perception of the truth and it is to the reader. . . .

*Joe McGinniss declined to be interviewed by the Review. These remarks were excerpted from comments made by McGinniss at a panel discussion on The Art of Nonfiction at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in April.*

**'Too many reporters play fairly fast and loose with what somebody said'**



## **WENDELL RAWLS, JR.**

As reporters, we generally deal with adults, grown people, who should understand that we are seeking what we hope is the truth. To call this process indefensible is ludicrous. Without sounding too high-minded about it, we are in the business of informing the public, and that's more important than the feelings of the person being interviewed.

Yes, there are times when I feel uncomfortable reporting facts that I imagine will cause a source some pain. I deal with it by calling up the source and telling him what I'm going to do. I don't let the source get ambushed.

But what concerns me most is sloppy reporting. Having been an editor for two and a half years and also having been the subject of several interviews by supposedly first-rate journalists, I am very concerned at how inaccurate the reporting is. I've found that reporters are very selective about which quotes they're going to use and also rearrange quotes to prove a point. And too many reporters play fairly fast and loose with what somebody said. They don't take good notes. They are listening to only half the quote, then get back to the office and can't remember what the other half was and are embarrassed to call the person back to ask for a clarification. I think that's a much more severe problem in American journalism and a severe test of our credibility. It has nothing to do with betraying anybody; it's simply a matter of craftsmanship.

One more point: I think Malcolm is a little off base in the way she uses the term "journalist." To me a journalist is a person who writes for newspapers and magazines and when he starts writing books he's an author, not a journalist. I know it's convenient to talk about book-length journalism but that's really just general nonfiction. A newspaper or magazine reporter generally doesn't spend enough time with a source to develop an emotional relationship that can lead to betrayal. The reporter is seeking information and moving on. Book writers come to a subject with a point of view. As an author you sell that point of view in order to make money. You sell access, you sell insider information, you sell, sell, sell. The journalist doesn't do that. He puts together facts for a story on a given day and his salary doesn't change. To me there's a big difference between an author telling a publisher how this or that is going to improve his book and a reporter telling his editor, "This is the truth."

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*Wendell Rawls, Jr. is assistant managing editor of The Atlanta Journal and Constitution.*

## **BARBARA WALTERS**

I think most of the time reporters come in and say, "Look, I want to do a piece on you and I believe that I will be fair and that it will be a balanced piece. Do you want to do it?" Still, there is a kernel of truth in what Malcolm says. It's not that the reporter comes on and lies; it's that there is a tendency in doing articles, especially magazine profiles, to look for what's sensational.

At the moment two different authors whom I don't know are writing books about me. From what comes back to me from the people they have called, the intent of one of them clearly seems to be to write something critical, derogatory, scathing, because that's what sells. Scathing profiles seem to sell more than flattering ones. I myself don't like to be interviewed for a magazine article. I feel much more comfortable being interviewed by television people because even if the interview is edited, some of what you said gets on. And there isn't the same opportunity to work in things like "she said sarcastically" or "she said, with a grin" or "with a smirk." I think everyone worries about being the victim of a hatchet job.

One of the reasons my specials with celebrities have been a success as long as they have been is that these people know that after I've talked to them I'm not going to go behind their back and talk to their ex-husband or the manager they fired or whatever. I mean, what you see is what you get. And that's one of the reasons they do these interviews. Nobody has been tricked, nobody has been deceived.

There are times when you're editing an interview when you think, Oh, I know he's not going to like this, but I'm going to leave it in. I have to leave it in. That's why you try not to do interviews with friends. But this just isn't the same as what Malcolm is talking about. I mean I never lead someone to think I'm going to do a flattering piece and then do something very different. For example, I was invited to

**'I think everyone worries about being the victim of a hatchet job'**



do an interview with the Duvaliers. My feeling is that they probably thought they were going to come out very well. But I had a lot of cancelled checks that showed thousands of dollars on their government expense accounts for personal jewelry, for example.

Now the interview did the Duvaliers absolutely no good; if anything, it did them harm. But I didn't come on and say to the Duvaliers, "Look, I'm your greatest admirer. I promise you, you're going to look good."

There was something Mrs. Duvalier said. She's very ar-

ticulate, very attractive, but she came on and she said — you know, you just can't live in Port au Prince without air-conditioning, which in that poverty-stricken country certainly didn't make her look very good. Well, so do you cut that out? Of course you don't. You don't even have to make a comment.

*Barbara Walters is co-host of ABC News's 20/20 and host of The Barbara Walters Specials.*



**'If you measure betrayal by a subject's disappointment you are engaging in a useless activity'**

## KITTY KELLEY

I can identify with Joe McGinniss's situation because I was in a similar one. My reputation, whatever it is, is built on unauthorized biographies. But I did a piece with Judith Campbell Exner for *People* magazine. We shared the payment fifty-fifty. I did the opposite of what McGinniss did with his subject — I didn't ingratiate myself with Mrs. Exner. I challenged her, I stood up to her, I fought her. I had editorial control and, when I turned that piece in, Mrs. Exner called *People* magazine and complained that I refused to put in things about her coming from a wonderful background and about her being a painter and living in this pretty house in Newport.

*People* magazine called me, and asked, "Why won't you say this just to make her feel better?" And I said, "Because I didn't see any pretty house in Newport and because she didn't show me any paintings."

Exner had a right to read what I wrote about her but she couldn't change it. The point of the piece was to say what the relationship was between this woman and the president of the United States and what his relationship was with the Mafia. That was the historic aspect of the story, as far as I was concerned. And I made that clear to Mrs. Exner. But when I would say, "I have to ask you this question," she would get angry and wouldn't answer it. But I don't think there was anything like betrayal in my dealings with Mrs.

Exner. I made my position clear from the start.

Often, you know, the things that as a journalist you think might bring discomfort to a subject, nine times out of ten that isn't the thing at all; it's something you haven't even thought about. For instance, I wrote this piece for *The Washingtonian* about the wife of Jack Kent Cooke [the billionaire real estate man, publisher, and sports team owner]. She gave me taped interviews over seventeen months and provided all the pictures. And when the piece was published she was very upset. And the things that bothered her were things the editor and I were stunned about.

We thought she would object to seeing herself revealed in print as a woman who talks about going off to have abortions at her husband's insistence. But, no, those weren't the things that bothered her: What bothered her was being quoted directly, saying, "Yeah." The word "yeah." She said it wasn't ladylike.

So if you measure betrayal by a subject's disappointment in the way he's presented, I think you are engaging in a useless activity.

*Kitty Kelley is a contributing editor of The Washingtonian and the author of unauthorized biographies of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and Frank Sinatra.*

If a reporter stays with a person or group long enough, they — reporter and subject — will develop a personal relationship of some sort, even if it is hostility. More often it will be friendship of some sort. For many reporters this presents a more formidable problem than penetrating the particular scene in the first place. They become stricken with a sense of guilt, responsibility, obligation. "I hold this man's reputation, his future, in my hands" — that becomes the frame of mind. They may begin to feel like voyeurs — "I have preyed upon this man's life, devoured it with my eyes, made no commitment myself, etc." People who become overly sensitive on this score should never take up the new style of journalism. They inevitably turn out second-rate work, biased in such banal ways that they embarrass even the subjects they think they are "protecting." A writer needs at least enough ego to believe that what he is doing as a writer is as important as what anyone he is writing about is doing and that therefore he shouldn't compromise his own work. If he doesn't believe that his own writing is one of the most important activities going on in contemporary civilization, then he ought to move on to something else he thinks is . . . become a welfare eligibility worker or a clean-investment counselor for the Unitarian Church or a noise abatement surveyor . . .

*from The New Journalism, by Tom Wolfe*

## THOMAS B. MORGAN

When I have defended McGinniss, because I basically feel McGinniss has won this argument, a lot of people say, "Oh, you're one of those people who believes the end justifies the means," and I say "No, I believe some ends justify some means. He wrote an honest book, he got his story." I think the means were justified by the end. Because to me the whole issue of integrity centers on what a journalist puts on paper, what he publishes in a magazine or a book.

As for my own journalistic means — and I don't say this with any pride — I have many times pretended to be amused by people who are not amusing, have nodded in agreement when I do not really agree, have asked ten irrelevant questions, knowing that the eleventh question is going to be a karate chop. I feel that morally defensible journalism is rarely, to paraphrase Hemingway, what you feel good about afterward; it is only that which makes you feel better than you would otherwise.

As a rule, the people I wrote about — and I must have written some forty or fifty profiles — were all in the public eye. Now people who present themselves to the public consciously project a certain image, and I always felt it was my job to deconstruct that image, so to speak. The whole thrust of most of my articles was: now we will test this or that person's image against reality. That's really what the New Journalism was all about.

The older form was typified by one of my favorite profiles, the one Lillian Ross did of Hemingway in *The New Yorker*. You don't feel her presence in that article. Then in the late fifties we nobodies, representing all the other nobodies, got access to the great, the famous, and the beautiful, and, as I say, we went into the business of deconstruction. The people we were writing about were people of power, people of substance, people of great fame, and some of them turned out to be, *in our opinion* — and it was always just our opinion — quite unworthy of it.

There were limits, self-imposed limits. For instance, I never wrote about a subject's sex life. As a matter of fact, I usually didn't write about a subject's married life at all. I felt that was private. I had a strong sense of what was private and what was public in a public person.

*Thomas B. Morgan is a novelist and journalist whose profiles written in the late 1950s and early '60s are considered precursors of the New Journalism.*

**'The whole issue of integrity centers on what a journalist puts on paper'**



CJR/Harvey Wang



Susan Oristaglio

**'The rhetorical tone of Malcolm's piece is straight out of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*'**

## LAWRENCE WESCHLER

You know about all the weird JM business in this story, with Janet Malcolm writing about Joe McGinniss writing about Jeffrey MacDonald and herself having written about Jeffrey Masson and the piece being called "The Journalist and the Murderer"? Well, I was telling someone you could have called the piece *Les Jouissances Meurtrières* — Deadly Pleasures or Murderous Orgasms — because the rhetorical tone of the piece is straight out of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. It is out of the Age of Reason, when people took perverse situations and derived from them immutable laws of human nature. Freud, of course, comes out of that tradition and Janet in turn gets a lot of her rhetorical tone from Freud.

The marquise in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* has all these elaborate theories about the complicated power relationships in love, and she looks down on the ordinary people who think of love as something really quite simple. Janet's piece, in a way, is the sort of piece about journalism the marquise might have written.

The marquise's analysis is spellbinding. But in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* it falls apart the minute real love enters the scene. Janet's thesis is spellbinding, too, and I want to emphasize that I think it's a remarkable piece of writing. But it falls apart in the same way. While the dynamic she describes is potential everywhere in journalism, it doesn't inevitably have to materialize. There are journalistic equivalents of love — compassion, engagement, conscience.

I am still on far more than talking terms with all the people that I have done profiles of. And I think I have portrayed some fairly complicated individuals, and portrayed them as both admirable and also demonical and all sorts of other things. My ideal for a profile is that I want it to be as if you were meeting this person. The highest thing that I aspire to is fairness and transparency. Even when I do a profile of somebody I am critical of I aspire to do it so fairly that he or she will say, "Yes, that's me."

I mean, I don't want to sound Pollyannaish. I'm all for doing devastating pieces, but I prefer to devastate institutions rather than people.

Now some people might feel that if you portray somebody

transparently, you're betraying him. The marquise might feel that way, but I don't.

Let's say, for example, that I am describing someone who, as I get to know him, I realize is an alcoholic. I don't think I need to say the guy is an alcoholic. I can portray him in bars, talking about being thirsty, or do other things that will provide a kind of feeling about that, but not a label. Later on, if somebody says, "God, you know he is an alcoholic. You didn't say that," I can say, "Well, go back and read the piece. It is there."

To label is in some cases to betray. Whereas if you show things I think you are being fair.

By the way, sometimes in my political reporting I get into situations directly analogous to what Janet was talking about. In fact, there was one particular incident during my reporting recently in Uruguay when I dealt with these issues in the body of the text, but ironically the paragraph was taken out in part because the editors at *The New Yorker* did not want to call further attention to the Janet drama. My article ran only two weeks after hers.

I was interviewing General Hugo Medina, the former junta head who was now the defense minister. He said that sometimes when they were interrogating people during

military dictatorship, they would do so "energetically."

And I said, "Energetically?"

And the way I originally wrote it is as follows: "He was silent for a moment, his smile steady. For him, this was clearly a game of cat and mouse. His smile horrified me, but presently I realized I'd begun smiling back (it seemed clear the interview had reached a crisis: either I was going to smile back, showing that I was the sort of man who understood these things or the interview was going to be abruptly over). So I smiled, and now I was doubly horrified that I was smiling. I'm sure he realized this, because he now smiled all the more, precisely at the way he'd gotten me to smile and how obviously horrified I was to be doing so. He swallowed me whole."

That is how the text read. And what is interesting about that passage is it displays exactly the kind of transparency that I am talking about. It describes the situation.

But, of course, when I write, "He swallowed me whole," I swallow him whole. So I have the last word. I get to have the Cheshire-cat grin.

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*Lawrence Weschler, a New Yorker staff writer, is the author of Shapinsky's Karma, Bogg's Bills, and Other True-Life Tales.*

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**'Sometimes your subject is horrified and it is just at one tiny little detail'**



Glen D. Strauss

## SARA DAVIDSON

The way I read her, Malcolm was finally airing the dirty little secrets of journalism. What she describes is something all of us are aware of and struggle with and come to terms with. It's something I first encountered as a very young journalist, in my early twenties. I was always very uncomfortable when I would go to interview someone.

Everyone has a different style of setting their subjects at ease, so that they will then tell you what, as Tom Wolfe said, in their own best interest they should never tell you. My style was to be very sympathetic, to make the person feel that I was a friend — not by saying anything false but by smiling or laughing at jokes, by seeming to agree with what they said. When you spend enough time with someone a relationship develops; whether it is a relationship of trust or humor or liking each other or being wary of each other, something develops. Then you go back to your room and everything that developed in that relationship is set aside while you sit down to write the truth as you see it. And you kind of go into a different space, a different mind set. You are looking at it as a piece of writing — whether it is coherent, whether the paragraphs work, whether it flows. And of course you are interested in its accuracy. Then you finish the piece and it's printed. And your subject calls you

up and is offended or horrified, and sometimes it is just at one tiny little detail.

A real turning point in my career as a reporter came when *Harper's Magazine* asked me to write a piece about Jacqueline Susann. I knew going into it that I had no particular respect for her writing or her way of promoting books. But it was interesting; she was the first person who made promoting a book into a big-time operation, and she did it like a science. She was very suspicious at the beginning because I was with *Harper's*. I said, "Well, my editor feels that what you have done is a really important publishing phenomenon and we would like to do a piece on it," and I basically convinced her to let me come along for a week on the promotion trail.

Then I wrote the piece. It wasn't my finest hour because she was such an easy target. Everything about her was mockable — from her false Korean hairpieces to the fact that when she sat next to me on the plane she would take these various pills, she called them wake-up pills, just like her characters in *Valley of the Dolls*. And her husband was making inane remarks and I wrote everything down and I wrote the article and I was hesitant about turning it in. I didn't feel very good about it.

Then the magazine sent Diane Arbus to take pictures of her. And she didn't know who Diane was, so she let her into her suite at the Beverly Hills Hotel and Diane took her usual kind of pictures, where everyone comes out looking like freaks. And everybody loved the piece — my agent, the editors — everybody thought it was wonderful, and I felt about two inches tall.

I made a decision at that point that I was not going to write about people and subjects toward whom I felt so negative at the outset. I was afraid, as a result, that my journalistic career might be over, because so much of my early

work and so much of the journalistic work that was being done in the sixties was tinged with sarcasm, with the sense that the author was superior to the subject. I wanted to see if I could write an interesting, vibrant journalism that did not have that sarcastic, mocking base, and that also wasn't a sugary puff piece.

My first attempt to do this was a long piece I was commissioned to do for *Esquire* about Richard Alpert, who was calling himself Baba Ram Dass. I was very interested in Eastern mysticism and I thought the piece I finally wrote was the best thing I had done in my entire career. I turned it in and it became the first piece I had ever written for a magazine that was rejected. The editor told me, "You will thank me for not publishing it. This guy's ideas are absolutely unintelligible and your willingness to embrace them makes you look foolish."

That's when I started thinking my career in journalism was over because here was this piece that wasn't sarcastic but an exploration of this phenomenon and what its appeal was, and the only magazine that liked it was *Ramparts*.

Very shortly after that I started writing *Loose Change*, and it was about my friends, about people I loved and still do love. So, again, I was writing in the way I had decided I wanted to write — about people for whom I felt admiration or sympathy or took great interest in. And when *Loose Change* came out it was enormously painful for the two women who, along with me, were the focus of the book. We were able to remain friends, but there was a year in which it was really touch and go.

Those were the days when the women's movement was in full flower and the heart of the movement was personal confession. Women were writing for publication about very intimate parts of their lives. And it was in that spirit that I wrote *Loose Change*. When I sat with the women to do those interviews, even though the tape recorder was running, it felt like hanging out with a friend.

There was an unreality about it. I had never published a book, neither of the other women had ever been interviewed for a book, and then three years later the book comes out and there's this vast audience that none of us had anticipated. I had gone to considerable lengths to disguise the identities of my two friends, but anybody who knew them and knew that they knew me could figure out who they were. And people would stop them on the street and say, "God, I didn't know you got pregnant when you were sixteen." Or, "I didn't know you could never have an orgasm." Suddenly this very private material shared with a friend was on the pages of a book for everybody to read. And former husbands and former boyfriends of theirs were absolutely livid.

One of the women said to me, "I kind of see why they're so angry. I didn't ask [my former husband] for permission to talk about the years we spent together, and here it is for anybody to read." She felt she had betrayed her responsibility to the privacy of people who had been in her life.

Later I wrote a novel called *Friends of the Opposite Sex*, which was inspired by a work project I did with a friend. I created a fictional character who was completely different from this person and I created a dozen other fictional characters. Nobody in the book had a personal history similar

to the personal histories of any of the people I knew.

And *still* people got furious. One didn't speak to me for four years. And the people who got angriest were writers themselves, which stunned me. So at this point, frankly, I have just come to feel, as one of my friends said to me, you write it as you see it, then publish and be damned.

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Sara Davidson, whose books include *Loose Change* and *Friends of the Opposite Sex*, is working on a book about baby boomers raising their children.

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**'Sometimes I'll shut off the tape when I think subjects could be hurting themselves inadvertently'**

## BARRY MICHAEL COOPER



CJR/Harvey Wang

There is a bit of the con man in the journalist. You have to console, you have to empathize, you have to plead, to get to the truth. And if you don't, if you are just blunt, you can say something that totally turns your subject off and he won't talk to you again. It's happened to me.

But I don't consider that malicious lying. I'd call it slanted empathy — empathy with a purpose. And that purpose is that you are trying to get to a larger truth. You are trying to establish what the real story is.

A lot of times reporting is war; you have to do what you have to do to get a truth. Once you are adept at getting someone off guard, I think you become a good interviewer.

Because I am always open to having my mind changed, I am not being two-faced. Essentially, what I am trying to do is to gather information. I will give you a case in point. In my interview with Larry Davis [who was charged with injuring six police officers in a shootout in the Bronx, but acquitted of the most serious charges], I knew I wasn't betraying him, even though my story was very critical in the end. I didn't know what I was going to write when I spoke with him. And he was spinning me around. I was just trying to get information from the guy. And I empathized with him in a few instances and in others I came right out and said, "I don't believe you."

I think a lot of times when you are honest with your subject you can get a reaction that tells the truth about him. Davis got impatient with me because I kept saying, "Tell me details you haven't told anybody else. Tell me the real truth." He got mad at first and then he started laughing and he said, "Wait for the movie." And that was a telling remark and an important part of the story because it was Davis seeing himself as what he had become: a media image.

This doesn't mean that I will print anything — particularly when the subject might not realize what he's saying. Sometimes, whether with Arsenio Hall or with Latinos who lived near the kids accused of raping the jogger in Central Park, I'll shut off the tape when I think they could be hurting themselves inadvertently. I'll say something like, "I want you to understand that this tape isn't running. What was recorded is on the record, as we agreed, but are you sure you want to continue with this conversation?"

In almost every case they say yes. In black and Latino neighborhoods in particular, I feel I have to do this. I hate to say it, but to be very honest, a lot of white journalists and reporters come to the black neighborhoods and never explain these things to people and the people wind up getting hurt. I find that when you are very honest with your subject — about what you know and what you think you are going to do — nine times out of ten people in the inner city are very honest in response and they respect you in the end.

*Barry Michael Cooper is a staff writer for The Village Voice who has written about teenage drug gangs in Detroit and Baltimore and about the youths accused of the gang rape of a jogger in New York's Central Park this spring.*

**'Reporters by dint of their training project a kind of pseudo-intimacy'**



Andy Dales

## DAVID HALBERSTAM

Malcolm really hit on something germane, but she has gone after it with a sledgehammer. I think "betrayal" is a very, very strong and ugly word. And to say that journalists, as a matter of course, do this is particularly offensive to anybody who was a reporter in the South, where many sources were very vulnerable to the white power structure, and reporters kept their trust; to anyone who was a reporter in Vietnam, where we often had sources who were enormously vulnerable to a powerful military machine, and where we kept the trust; or to colleagues of mine who worked with dissidents in the Soviet Union and kept the trust.

Now I think you can practice journalism well and do your job and be straight. But I also think there is the potential for an imbalance here. The reporter has dealt with hundreds of people in all kinds of situations. And reporters by dint of their training have a considerable amount of charm and grace and the ability to get people to talk — to project a kind of pseudo-intimacy. By contrast, in many cases far from public-domain journalism they are dealing with ordinary people who have never dealt with a reporter before. Perhaps the way to confront this is to think of members of your own family: How would you want them to be treated?

When I was in Vietnam, Horst Faas of the AP and I got

**My only advantage as a reporter is that I am so physically small, so temperamentally unobtrusive, and so neurotically inarticulate that people tend to forget that my presence runs counter to their best interests. And it always does. That is one last thing to remember: writers are always selling somebody out.**

*from Slouching Towards Bethlehem, by Joan Didion*

these little name tags that we sewed on our fatigue jackets that said "Halberstam, New York Times," and "Faas, AP." Most of the reporters began to do this. We didn't want anyone to speak to us with any misimpression of who we were.

I think the relationship is much easier with sources in the traditional public domain. Both sides tend to know the rules of the game and how to play it. Neil Sheehan tells a very accurate story in *A Bright Shining Lie* about John Vann, the lieutenant colonel who was certainly in the great tradition of sources in that he was using us to disseminate information and we were relying on him for what we believed was his realistic appraisal of what was happening.

There was a moment when he virtually got court martialed because of his relationship with me. He was being sent home and we gave him a small silver cigarette box at the airport and he and I walked across the tarmac to his plane and I said, "You know, I was always scared that when I was writing about you I would hurt you."

He gave me a quite cold, steely look and said, "You never hurt me any more than I wanted to be hurt."

I think Malcolm is writing about a new and important and contemporary phenomenon, a change in nonfiction letters, where the book is show-business driven and the reporter is not so much a reporter in the classic sense but an agent of Hollywood. I would call this mini-series journalism, where the journalist covers a murder in no small part because it has a potential mini-series in it.

The networks like these mini-series done off real life stories. And, of course, they want releases from the subjects. In this area Malcolm is quite right: the writer wants to ingratiate himself or herself with X or Y in order to get not just the story, but the release.

I think this leads to all kinds of abuses. Instead of normal access you need a new level of intimacy and a legal relationship. The murderer may be your literary partner.

McGinniss's relationship with MacDonald was bizarre, and I think it was unnecessary. Joe McGinniss is so talented he could have written a wonderful book without MacDonald being his best pal, roommate, and literary partner. Whether he could have gotten a legal agreement which released the mini-series is another thing. I am terribly bothered by a contract that gives a man like MacDonald 30 or 35 percent. I think Joe should be ashamed of himself.

*David Halberstam, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting from Vietnam in 1964 for The New York Times, is the author of several books of nonfiction.*

**'When people write about other people, they are really writing about themselves'**



## A. M. ROSENTHAL

Malcolm is absolutely right when she says that the relationship between subject and reporter can very easily lead to shading the truth, even to falsehood, in order to draw people out. But when she says that this is *inevitable*, I just dismiss that. I don't think it is true. It may very well be true about *her*, because — it's a fascinating thing — I've found that very often when people talk or write about other people they are really talking or writing about themselves. They are looking at themselves. They are holding up a mirror.

The world of journalism is more complicated than she makes out. Nowadays we all tend to reduce journalism to cops-and-robbers stories or scandal stories or corruption stories. The purpose of journalism has come to be seen as to hit somebody hard. But there are other purposes — namely, to find out and inform. We've had our share of those destructive stories at the *Times*, but they are not, to my thinking, the be-all and end-all.

I know of occasions when the *Times* wouldn't print stories because we couldn't get them our way — honestly, through careful interviewing and fact-checking. The *Times* doesn't permit masquerading. You can get a lot of good stories by pretending to be a cop, but that isn't what journalism is supposed to do. Journalism is not a license to lie, steal, cheat. Quite the contrary.

If you have a story and you know it is going to hurt the

person about whom you are writing, first you simply have to sit down and write the story as you think you ought to. Then, I have always said to people, including myself, reread the story and mentally substitute your own name in place of the subject's. If you do that you may think to yourself, This is a hell of a mean, tough story. It is going to make that person's wife or husband cry. Or the person will be severely damaged. But if you can say, still thinking as if you're the subject, "It's a fair story. He quoted me accurately. He didn't read thoughts into my head. He didn't pretend he knew more than he could know. He didn't use any anonymous pejorative quotes" — if you can say all this, then you say, "Well, okay. That is my story. Too bad for him."

A lot of things in Malcolm's articles were terribly interesting to me as a person who has been interviewed rather than as an interviewer. She makes it clear, she describes it — the person being interviewed almost always talks too much, says too much. I myself always say, "Well, I'll give you thirty minutes and that's it." I never stick to it though. And if you go on, sooner or later you will say things you probably didn't want to. And the interviewer just nods. So I recognize that: I have a tendency to rattle on when I am being interviewed.

She also explains very well how the interviewee wants the interviewer to see him as he sees himself. Which just doesn't happen, or seldom happens. I've found that if a person is hostile when he enters the room, he'll leave hostile. I've learned this, but I still don't quite believe it, so, for instance, I still agree to talk to people, or most people, who want to interview me, not just because I feel I have an obligation to, but also because I still believe I can persuade that person, make him see things as I do.

*A. M. Rosenthal, the former executive editor of The New York Times, is now a columnist for the Times.*



**'A portrait could be done of us that is nothing more than an accumulation of our failings'**

## JOHN TAYLOR

Malcolm's main assertion is so overly broad as to be ridiculous. But there are aspects of what she says that are worth considering seriously.

I think the journalist has a responsibility not to take advantage, for the sake of his own article, of the kind of human, weak, foolish things that we all do and say in the course of our lives. To make merciless fun of someone who has agreed to be profiled is, I think, very unfair. To me that is like breaching the sort of social contract you have entered into.

It's a different matter if you are doing a story about a person who hasn't cooperated; the same sort of social contract doesn't exist. This doesn't mean, however, that you are required to be totally ruthless and exploit every weakness and slip up on the part of your subject. After all, the point of writing a profile is to capture the spirit of the person and what that person is all about in unguarded moments. We are all vain and pompous and ridiculous and a portrait could be done of us that is nothing more than an accumulation of our failings. But that isn't what we are all about; there is more to all of us than the sum of our flaws.

*John Taylor writes for New York magazine; his article "Holier Than Thou," published in New York in March, explored Jeffrey Masson's libel suit against Janet Malcolm.*

**'A little part of me wanted to see if she could vindicate herself'**

## EMILY YOFFE



CJR/Alan Pogue

When I want people to talk to me I am sincerely interested. That's not my false self. That's me. I take notes with a notebook, so I'm always writing down everything the source is saying and, if I get behind, I will say, "Hold on a second. Let me get that," or "Say that again?" So there are constant reminders that what I am doing is going into print.

I do think we journalists have a lot of power and I don't think we can be careless about it. For example, I was working on this story about a doctor who was accused of causing the deaths of or permanent injury to several people. Everything I looked into led me to believe that she was dangerous and that the medical profession had abdicated its responsibility to stop her. Still, when I spent a day talking to her and listening to her side of the story, even though I didn't feel it held up, part of me identified with her. Here was a professional woman about my age — a little bit older so she had experienced more discrimination — and part of her defense was that this is a sexist world and these professional

**'It would be very sobering for journalists to put themselves in the shoes of the newsmaker'**



## CLARENCE PAGE

I have been in the situation myself where I have been the subject of interviews and found my words being subjected to the interpretation of somebody else's journalism.

I think it would be very sobering for all journalists to go through that experience so they can put themselves in the shoes of the newsmaker. My personal experience had to do with my former wife's suicide two years after we were divorced. Her name was Leanita McLain; she was an editorial writer and columnist here at the *Chicago Tribune*.

It was quite a remarkable story — very sad and very shocking to a lot of people. I was interviewed by broadcast and print journalists locally and nationally. In some cases I kind of gritted my teeth as I was being interviewed because

men don't want to see professional women as equals. I felt her humanity and I knew what the effect of my story would be.

During the negotiation to get her to agree to talk, I said I wanted to tell her side of the story. And I did, and it's there. I didn't say, "Talk to me because I will show how you've been mistreated."

Now, all the time she was talking to me, I thought, Boy, everything I have heard indicates to me that nothing you can possibly say is going to vindicate you. So why didn't I say this to her? Because, for one thing, a little part of me wanted to see if she could vindicate herself. And, for another, because if I started out with that, I probably wouldn't get her side of the story. But my questions to her made it very clear what I had discovered about her.

Once I did a story about congressional press secretaries. And one of the press secretaries I interviewed lost his job over the story. I felt absolutely awful; it was never my intention to have anyone lose his job and, in fact, he lost his job because he was being too honest about what it was he did and because it made his boss look like the publicity hound he was. It was a case where I was sitting there interviewing him, thinking, "I can't believe you are telling me this stuff." And he was very young and I was very young. If I were doing such a piece now and it was someone very young, I don't know if I'd warn him — through the tone of my questions — about what he was saying. But then again, what he did was describe his job and I just wrote down what he told me. It was his boss who fired him — simply for telling the truth — not me.

*Emily Yoffe is a senior editor of Texas Monthly.*

I did not have much trust in the reporter's abilities to tell the story straight. For example, some journalists really felt a crying need to find a reason why Leanita committed suicide. The fact is nobody knows; I don't think anybody knows why anybody commits suicide. All you can do is speculate. And journalists aren't supposed to speculate. Journalists are supposed to report.

One broadcast journalist said, "Friends attributed her suicide to the pressure of being a role model for other young blacks." I have yet to find a friend who said that. I think that sounded so good that the journalist just couldn't resist saying it.

The way the reporters conducted the interviews telegraphed to me the point they were trying to make. For example, the ones who just kept asking, "But didn't she feel real anger about white folks? Didn't she feel real depression about the state of Black America?" I just had to give answers that were honestly ambivalent like, "She may have said or written this or that, but as far as whether or not that contributed to her actual depression, I have no way of being able to say that." And, in fact, a good case could be made that her ability to express that in print may have eased her depression.

A candid journalist would accept those answers at face value and report them that way. Others would ignore the ambivalence and just use the part that supported their point.

That is the sort of thing I could see some people interpreting as betrayal. I feel that it was just sloppy journalism.

Sometimes, though, you are in situations where you think, Boy, somebody just cooked his goose, I should be judicious with this. I am thinking about Jesse Jackson and the Hymietown quote. Evidently, Jesse thought it was off the record and the reporter interviewing him did not. That became a point of controversy. Other reporters told me afterwards that Jesse had talked that way to them or in their presence and they understood it was off the record so they didn't report it. I think it is a gray area.

If it had happened to me, I will tell you quite frankly —

and this is Monday morning quarterbacking — I would ask Reverend Jackson for clarification. I would simply say, "Excuse me, Reverend. When you refer to Jews as 'Hymies' and to New York as 'Hymietown,' just exactly what do you mean by that?"

In general, though, to tell you the truth, I have always been troubled by the notion that we should not run quotes past the newsmaker after we have interviewed them. But I always end up sticking by the idea that we should not.

*Clarence Page is an editorial writer at the Chicago Tribune and winner of a 1989 Pulitzer Prize for commentary.*

Theresa Mackin



### 'There is no way a reporter does not react personally to a subject'

### DAN WAKEFIELD

Janet Malcolm raised important questions about issues that rightly make journalists uncomfortable, because there isn't any set of rules dealing with the ambiguous area of the personal interaction between journalist and subject. We try to adhere to fairness and objectivity but there is no way a reporter does not react personally to a subject, and this is bound to influence what is written. The recognition of this is really a taboo subject — as the overheated attacks on Ms. Malcolm seem to indicate.

Despite the purity of my own intentions, I probably have seduced people. I don't think I ever knowingly said to somebody, "Well, I really like you," and then did that person in. What I did was just not say anything at all. When I went to the South for the *Nation* and somebody asked me, "What is the *Nation*?" I didn't say, "It's a liberal magazine that thinks segregation is evil and is out to get you." What I said was, "It's a weekly and it's published in New York," and I remember that several people asked, "Is it anything like *Nation's Business*?" And I said, "I guess so, because they're both weeklies and they're both published in New York." That certainly wasn't playing straight.

When I think back to that period, to the business of reporting in the South, there was only one journalist I ever heard who played it straight and this was in a courthouse in the Mississippi delta.

Somebody in New York who wanted to get Murray Kempton in trouble had sent one of his columns to the sheriff and this guy with his gun belt strapped on comes over to Kempton and says, "Boy, are you the fellow who wrote this?" and Kempton said something like, "Yes, sir, I have

been sent here to do you in. I have been sent here to make you look bad."

I was shocked. I had never before, and I have never since, heard anything like that and it was great.

There was a point where I stopped hedging around, even in the South, and here is what happened. I was down there on one of those segregation stories and I was staying at the local motel and I called up the guy who was the head of the White Citizens Council. He knew what the *Nation* was, so he said, "Why should I talk to you? That's like Gimbel's talking to Macy's," and I said, "I'm going to write about this anyway, so you might as well talk to me. I would really like to know what you have to say." We talked on the phone for about ten minutes and he said, "Why don't you come on out here right now and we'll have a beer."

I went out to his house and I spent the whole afternoon talking to the guy. At certain points I would be listening and I would be writing things down, and sometimes I would use a seduction technique I had developed: if people were saying something I thought was really embarrassing I would try not to be writing at that moment, because I didn't want them to see my hand moving and clam up. I would wait until they said something kind of innocuous and that's when I would write down the awful thing they had said. So I would be there pausing and the Citizens Council guy would say, "Write that down, boy!" And he would be making what I considered outrageous statements about blacks, and I would say to myself, Oh, he wouldn't want this in print. But he would say, "Write that down, boy."

At any rate, my lesson from that and also from writing profiles was that basically everybody wants to be interviewed, no matter who you are or what your position is. Somehow there is some kind of honor or prestige involved in being interviewed. My experience was that everybody in the world was willing to talk and I was always amazed.

I honestly feel that if I were to go out to do a piece of journalism right now, I would do it better as a result of having read Malcolm's article. I think I could do my job with greater integrity, because the issues are staring you in the face and you can't just kind of let the ethical issue slide by. If I was interviewing the head of some White Citizens Council somewhere, for instance, I think I would really try to come closer to the Murray Kempton technique.

*Dan Wakefield is a novelist, a journalist, and a screenwriter. His most recent book is Returning: A Spiritual Journey.*

## JESSICA MITFORD

I thought Malcolm's articles were marvelous. What came through was the whole awful business of McGinniss leading the convict to believe that he was absolutely on his side. I thought that was rotten, particularly while McGinniss was partaking of his hospitality. Which doesn't mean that I am against certain tactics. I make up ethics according to the situation. In fact, when I was teaching journalism and students would come to ask me about ethics, I would say, "Well, ethics have never been my strong point, so let's skip it."

A couple of examples: Is it ethical to ring up an undertaker and, when it isn't so, say that your mother is dying and you want to make some arrangements for the funeral? I did that quite a bit in gathering material for *The American Way of Death*. I don't see anything wrong in that at all.

Another example has to do with a story I was assigned but then decided not to write. This was years ago when Julie Andrews was making a film called *Hawaii*.

Anyway, I had met Julie Andrews when I was down in L.A. working on the film *The Loved One*. We used to have dinner together and I thought she was the most charming, unspoiled girl. Then *Redbook* asked me to stay with her in Hawaii for a week or so and do a profile.

George Roy Hill, the director of *Hawaii*, had recruited a lot of extras who were Fiji Islanders. At one point the company wanted to fire Hill because he had exceeded the budget by who knows how many million dollars. Well, the Fijians banded together and said they wouldn't work for any other director because Hill was the only person who had been decent to them and had not behaved like a racist. And, of course, the company had to capitulate.

I thought that was marvelous, but Julie was absolutely on the side of the company. Well, to me that was a very important issue. That was one thing; the other was that she told me a lot of very confidential things about her childhood and her psychoanalysis. She'd gone all Hollywood.

So I didn't do that profile. I didn't want to make it all rosy, especially because of this business with the Fiji Islanders. And yet I felt that, since I had accepted her hospitality, I couldn't really bad-mouth her.

You make decisions based on the importance of what you're doing weighed against the feelings of the person you are dealing with.

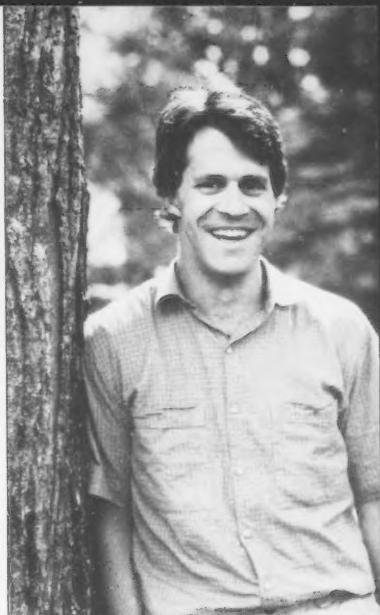
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*Jessica Mitford is the author of The American Way of Death and Poison Penmanship: The Gentle Art of Muckraking.*



**'I make up ethics according to the situation'**

**'I struggle more with my own peculiar need to omit than with the idea that I could mug somebody'**



Christopher Little

## MARK SINGER

The thing I most resent about this whole controversy is that, by forcing us to defend ourselves against the charge that journalism is morally indefensible, it makes those of us who practice journalism sound like self-righteous jerks. And that's regrettable, because the issue in the abstract is really important and it is not one that I had ever seen discussed.

Here is how I relate to it. I get an actual, physical symptom when I go out to do reporting — a kind of butterflies-in-the-stomach feeling. And that's because I have to sort of barge in on somebody's life. Why do it? Because, for me, it's fun to find something out. I don't see the process as heartless or cold-blooded but as an act of discovery. Whenever I write about someone at length, something approximating friendship arises. I get to know them, and I have learned things about them. I happen to be the sort of person who feels compelled — I hope not in a narcissistic way but out of a sense of fairness — to reveal part of myself to the person I am writing about. This comes in part from a genuine feeling that I am an invader, an intruder. Ultimately, with most of my subjects I come to feel that they have revealed too much of themselves. Let's say a person reveals that he or she is having an extramarital affair, and adds, "But please don't print that." What happens with me is that I wouldn't print it anyway. It bothers me that the subject even raises the issue.

My point is that, as a journalist, you're given a lot of responsibility. I'm aware that there are some people out there who abuse it. But I just don't believe that it is done universally. That notion is ridiculous.

As for myself, I am more bothered by my own peculiar need to omit and I struggle with that more than I do with the idea that I could mug somebody. Perhaps I could be accused of betraying the truth by protecting the subject, but as far as I'm concerned the word "betrayal" isn't relevant to what most journalists do. ■

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*Mark Singer is a staff writer at The New Yorker and the author of Funny Money and Mr. Personality.*

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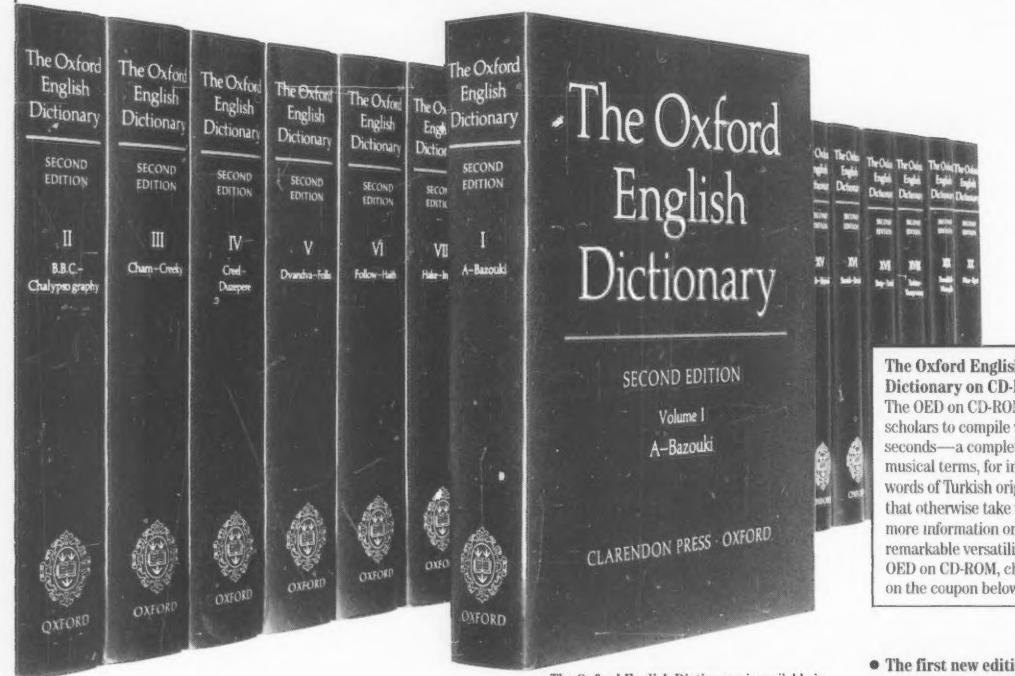
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# FUTURES SHOCK HITS CHICAGO...

The story line was right out of a made-for-television movie: FBI agents disguised as traders descend into the pits of the world's largest commodities exchanges to ferret out suspected fraud. Word of the encounter between New Gatsbys and modern-day Eliot Nesses is leaked to the press. Before even a single indictment is returned, a media feeding frenzy ensues, ruining reputations and producing paranoia in the pits about who might be government agents or informants.

For traders and officials at the Chicago Board of Trade and the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, this story proved to be all too real earlier this year. When the *Chicago Tribune* broke the news on January 19 that the Justice Department had conducted an undercover sting operation at the exchanges, hordes of reporters converged on the scene. What began as a government leak swiftly became a torrent of intrusively gathered news stories that were frequently misleading and sometimes inaccurate.

One of the first victims of the journalistic excesses was John Geldermann, newly elected chairman of the Merc's board of governors. The evening of January 19, Cable News Network carried a story claiming that three brokerage

firms, including one "owned by" Geldermann, had been subpoenaed. As the firms were identified in the voiceover, the words "IMPLICATED FIRMS" appeared on viewers' screens. In truth, no subpoenas had been issued to any of the firms and Geldermann had only a minor financial interest in the firm CNN said he owned.

CNN retracted that story the next evening, but Geldermann says the mistake could easily have been avoided. "They never even tried to talk to me or anyone at the firm beforehand," Geldermann says. "But I'm not surprised now. Unverified stories have been the rule rather than the exception."

By the weekend, the sting story had appeared on the network news and was on the front pages of *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. David Alpert, a veteran independent trader at the Merc, was attending a convention on the West Coast. "A friend of mine came up and began patting me down like he was an FBI agent," Alpert recalls. "I was not amused."

Meanwhile, Alpert's wife, Linda, was fending off repeated calls from *Tribune* reporters. She says that one reporter told her, "Rumor has it that your husband has been subpoenaed. I'd like to talk to him right away."

"My heart was pounding," Linda Alpert says. "I didn't believe the information she was giving me was correct, but I had no way of reaching David at that point to find out."

When Alpert returned to Chicago he received a call from another *Tribune* re-

by DAVID L. PROTESS

## DID THE PRESS PLAY PROSECUTOR IN COVERING AN FBI STING?

David L. Protess is a professor at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism and a free-lance investigative reporter. He formerly directed investigative reporting projects for Chicago's Better Government Association. A version of this article recently appeared in *Chicago Lawyer*. In the interest of full disclosure, it should be noted that Protess is married to an attorney for the National Futures Association. The association regulates aspects of the futures industry that are not related to the federal probe described in this article.

# ... MERC CHIEF CHIDES PRESS USE

porter. "I have a list of people who have been subpoenaed and your name is on it," Alpert recalls the reporter as saying. "I asked him where he got his list and he said from sources that he could not disclose. By this time I couldn't concentrate. My stomach churned."

Later, Alpert learned that he had not been subpoenaed. The reporters apparently were using the old ploy of pretending to know something they did not know in the hope of getting it confirmed if it happened to be true.

"When I found out that the *Tribune* had been misleading me, I was very angry," Alpert says. "Here were reporters upsetting my wife and family. They have no business doing that."

Alpert and Geldermann were among hundreds of traders and exchange officials contacted by *Tribune* reporters after the newspaper broke the story of the sting, according to Dean Baquet, the paper's associate metropolitan editor, who supervised the paper's investigation. "We made random calls to every trader we could get," he says. "We had at least ten reporters calling in shifts." He adds, "We certainly weren't trying to freak anyone out. Overall, I would say we were less aggressive in trying to reach traders than the exchanges are in soliciting customers."

*Tribune* managing editor F. Richard Ciccone acknowledges that there might have been occasional excesses. "We try to treat people with great courtesy in doing this," he says, "but sometimes the scope of the story forces you to bend the rules of normal courteous restraint."

"It was dirty work," says William Neikirk, the *Tribune*'s financial editor. "Our conclusion was that we had to do it."

**O**n Friday the 13th of January, six days before the *Tribune*'s disclosure of the federal investigation, Anton R. Valukas, U.S. attorney for the northern district of Illinois, went to Washington to brief Attorney General Dick L. Thornburgh and other Justice Department officials on the investigation. At that meeting a decision was

made to terminate the undercover portion of the investigation and move on to seek indictments. By Monday the 16th, word of the investigation had begun to leak to news organizations. Mark Eissman, associate editor of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, recalls having received a call that day "from a law enforcement source in Washington who said he might have some interesting stuff very soon." Two days later, Eissman says, the source called again and "volunteered that the interesting stuff involved a major federal investigation of commodities trading." However, the source did not offer many details of the alleged probe.

Meanwhile, the *Tribune* was pursuing a similar lead. Christopher Drew, the *Tribune*'s Justice Department correspondent in Washington, had flown to Chicago Tuesday morning to work on the story. While Drew refused to discuss his sources, *Tribune* managing editor Ciccone was somewhat more forthcoming. "What we had was reports in both Chicago and Washington," Ciccone says. "I won't say which was the chicken and which was the egg. The information came from both cities."

John Troelstrup, a former top enforcement official for the Commodity Futures Trading Commission's central region, charges that there were "leaks from the Justice Department in Washington to various news organizations." Troelstrup, an attorney who now represents futures industry clients, says he learned this from two reliable sources — one close to the Justice Department, the other being Christopher Drew himself.

Troelstrup claims that, after he and Drew had appeared on a February 2 television show about the investigation, Drew confided to him that some of the *Tribune*'s information came from Justice Department leaks. Drew responds, "Mr. Troelstrup and I might have discussed how these kinds of stories develop. However, it is flat wrong for him to say that I discussed my sources of information with him. No way would I do that."

Nonetheless, there can be little doubt that the leaks that led to the *Tribune*'s

initial story came from government sources. Drew was working on the story even before a grand jury was empaneled in the investigation — that is, before anyone outside the government could properly have known the investigation even existed.

Shortly after 5 P.M. on Wednesday, January 18, *Tribune* editors decided to disclose the government investigation in the next morning's editions. At about the same time, *Sun-Times* investigative reporter Art Petacque says he reached "a top-level Justice Department official in Washington who confirmed that the green light had been given" to seek indictments in the case.

"He gave me some details that the *Tribune* did not have and said, 'Go ahead, you won't have to retract it,'" says Petacque, who adds that he then received further confirmation of the probe from "a source very close to" U.S. attorney Valukas. The *Sun-Times* published its first story on the case on January 20, a day behind the *Tribune*.

**R**egardless of their point of origin, the leaks were directed toward Chicago news organizations. *Washington Post* Justice Department reporter Ruth Marcus says that "while I knew that Valukas was in Washington [on January 13], I wasn't able to learn the purpose of his meeting with Thornburgh before the *Tribune* broke the story." Nor did *The New York Times* receive advance notice of the story; the key information in its first story was attributed to the *Tribune*, Reuters, and an unnamed exchange official.

The result was that the *Tribune* and *Sun-Times* went toe to toe in seeking new developments in the breaking story. *The Wall Street Journal* also put significant resources into advancing the story. For most other news organizations the investigation became a major story, but one that was covered largely through wire service reports and analytical pieces that spotlighted life in the pits.

U.S. PROBES FUTURES EXCHANGES, the *Tribune*'s January 19 headline announced. FEDERAL PROBE TARGETS 6 TOP

# OF RUMOR, UNNAMED SOURCES . . .

FUTURES TRADERS, said the January 20 *Sun-Times*, reflecting the details provided by reporter Petacque's Justice Department source. HOW FBI WORKED TRADER STING, said the *Tribune's* second-day headline, reflecting the paper's inside knowledge of the probe.

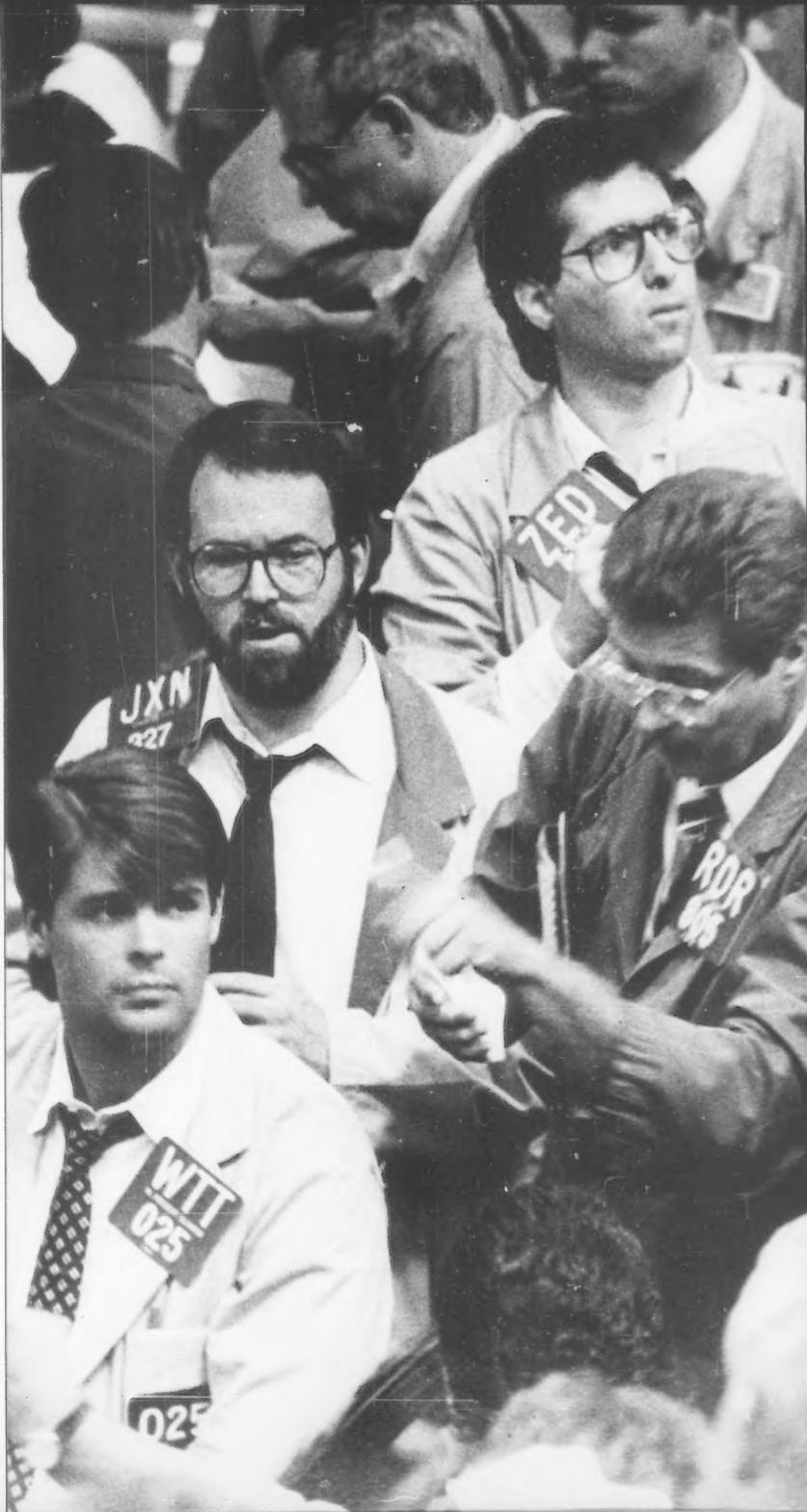
The *New York Times*'s initial story was understatedly headlined FBI SAID TO STUDY CHICAGO CHEATING IN FUTURES TRADES. The *Wall Street Journal* proclaimed that FBI STING OPERATION IN CHICAGO STAGGERS 2 FUTURES EXCHANGES.

All of the stories had one common characteristic: none of the allegations was attributed to anybody with a name. In fact, a content analysis of the first ten days of coverage conducted by students at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism showed that almost two-thirds of all information contained in the stories was attributed to anonymous sources.

The *Tribune's* disclosures cited "sources familiar with the inquiry" and "knowledgeable sources." The *Sun-Times* relied on "a source close to the investigation" and "a law enforcement source." Later the *Sun-Times* quoted "a lonely crime-syndicate chieftain" to knock down a Reuters wire story that itself used unnamed sources to allege mob ties to futures fraud. The *Journal* quoted "one law enforcement man" and "one law enforcement official in Washington."

Some reporters and editors were troubled by their reliance on anonymous sources. *Tribune* executive editor Jack Fuller says, "I've been very concerned about the use of anonymous sources generally. The reason for being strict on them is to ensure accuracy and com-

Ernie Cox Jr./Chicago Tribune



**Gotcha!** After looking through thousands of negatives of photographs taken at the Mercantile Exchange last year, the Chicago Tribune was able to identify the bearded trader wearing badge number JXN 327 as an undercover FBI agent.

# ... TRADER CHARGES HARASSMENT,

plteness. We were convinced in *this* case that the information was correct, so it wasn't a problem." *Tribune* editor Banquet echoes Fuller's concern, saying, "You have to be very careful not to get used." Indeed, some journalists and lawyers believe that the leaks were designed to create headlines that would scare potential defendants into cooperating with the government.

Despite their concerns about using unnamed sources, *Tribune* editors made the call to publish their initial stories without even knowing the names of their reporters' sources. "I was comfortable knowing the job position or rank of the source," says managing editor Ciccone. "I had enough specific information that I could have figured out who they were if my reporters got hit by a bus."

As to the problem of being "used," the *Tribune*'s early stories certainly reflected a strong prosecution slant. The paper's first two main stories on January 19 and 20 laid out the prosecution's case, saying that targets could face an array of charges under various federal statutes.

On January 23, the *Tribune* carried a very flattering profile of U.S. attorney Valukas. **COMMODITIES INTEREST GIVES VALUKAS EDGE**, read the headline. The story said that the federal prosecutor's "interest now has culminated in an investigation said to rival the Wall Street insider-trading scandal."

On January 27 the *Tribune* cited "sources familiar with the inquiry" to claim that at least thirty traders and brokers had become government informants. The story reportedly generated considerable paranoia among potential defendants, pressuring them to cooperate with the government.

On its editorial page, the *Tribune* gushed, "Valukas deserves congratulations for conceiving and implementing his ambitious crusade to weed out any unscrupulous traders who might be threatening the integrity of the markets." That was quite an accolade for an investigation that had not even been publicly acknowledged by Valukas or his Justice Department superiors.

Editorially, *The Wall Street Journal* took a distinctly different tack. It called the government probe a "Valukas extravaganza" and demanded that Attorney General Thornburgh either "stand up and shoulder the responsibility for the tactics being used in Chicago . . . or he ought to fire Mr. Valukas." The *Journal*'s distance from the government also was reflected in its reporters' greater reliance on traders as sources, albeit anonymous ones.

"Maybe we didn't have the *Tribune*'s law enforcement sources, but we did have very good sources in the pits," says John Koten, the *Journal*'s Chicago bureau chief. "I believe that we consistently beat the *Trib* on the important facts of the story. The only area where they shone was the early information Chris Drew got in Washington."

The distinctions on where the unattributed information came from were academic to Leo Melamed, head of the Merc's executive committee. "We were suddenly faced with an avalanche of questions from the media," he says. "Yet we weren't in a position to explain anything. It was all rumor and innuendo based on anonymous sources. How do you answer a charge by someone who isn't identified?"

**A**s the coverage became increasingly competitive, its basic thrust was veritably etched in stone. The *Tribune*, the *Sun-Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal* all framed the story as one of fraud at the exchanges. The main question remaining was the scope of the wrongdoing.

Perhaps the most dramatic story on this subject was actually first revealed by Knight-Ridder Financial News, rather than the three competing newspapers. On Tuesday, January 24, Knight-Ridder reporters who worked at the wire service's offices in the Board of Trade building spotted two people who "looked like FBI agents," according to news editor Robert Bogda. The reporters' hunch proved correct.

"They followed the agents around as

they handed out pieces of paper to various trading firms," Bogda recalls. The pieces of paper turned out to be subpoenas for massive amounts of documents kept by the firms. "We interviewed the firms and the agents themselves," Bogda says, "and we were able to file a late-morning bulletin on what had transpired."

The next day, newspapers across the country published accounts of the event — which they unfortunately misapprehended. The *Tribune* said the subpoenas represented "a sweeping escalation" of the federal probe. The *Sun-Times* reported that the "extensive new demand for records" was targeted at more than "10 billion trading documents" and "marked the first time the investigation has focused on companies rather than individual traders and brokers." The *Journal* said, "The federal investigation into futures trading fraud widened substantially, as law enforcement officials blanketed the Chicago futures industry with more than 250 subpoenas."

"These stories bordered on the absurd," says Merc official Melamed. "They gave the false impression that the firms themselves had become implicated."

In fact, the newspapers' conclusion that the probe had widened was a quantum leap in logic. A futures firm's relationship with a trader is like a bank's relationship with a customer. The firm has no supervisory authority and is no more responsible for what a trader does than a bank is for what a customer does.

To Andrew Yemma, the Merc's spokesperson, the papers' coverage of the subpoenas for firm records was part of a larger problem. "Most reporters suddenly assigned to the story had almost no idea about how the exchanges function," Yemma says. The *Sun-Times*'s Eissman acknowledges that his paper's coverage of the subpoenas might have been misleading. "We were reaching to show the enormity of the subpoenas that were issued," he concedes. "But in the process we may have suggested that there was more wrongdoing

# DECEPTION BY JOURNAL DUO . . . .

than we now know to exist."

By the end of January, journalists' attention turned to "color" stories about the FBI undercover agents and the traders who dealt with them. Here the *Tribune* excelled, but ironically its efforts further contributed to the perception in some circles that the paper was in cahoots with the Justice Department.

On January 29 the *Tribune* published a close-up photograph of one of the federal agents trading in the commodities pits. Some readers and competing journalists jumped to the conclusion that the FBI agent had posed as a favor to their cohorts at the *Trib.*

That was not so. After learning the assumed name of the agent from traders, the *Tribune* obtained the identification code of the badge he wore in the pits from an exchange directory. Then the *Tribune* photo staff looked through thousands of negatives of photographs taken at the exchanges during the previous year, searching for the trader with that badge. This tedious exercise yielded the photograph of the agent. It also made it possible for *Tribune* reporters to identify traders standing near him, who were contacted for additional color on the moles.

But with no new developments to report in the government's case, the coverage gradually faded from the front pages in February.

**A**s spring approached with still no indictments in the federal investigation, some reporters used more aggressive newsgathering techniques to breathe new life into the story. On Easter weekend, *Tribune* reporter Thomas M. Burton made unannounced visits to the homes of several traders. In one case, Burton disrupted an Easter Sunday backyard family gathering.

"I thought he was going to hit me," Burton says of the angry trader who threw him off the property. Burton, who was not on deadline at the time, sees nothing wrong with what he did. "I was trying to get information for a story," he says.

Burton also made repeated telephone calls to the home and workplace of former Merc employee Carole Bovard. "He continually harassed me after I refused to talk to him," Bovard says. "He said it was my civic duty to talk to him. When I wouldn't, he showed up at my home unannounced."

Burton denies Bovard's charge but he admits that going to her home "proved to be a tactic that didn't work. It made her husband pretty mad." Burton adds that as a general rule he went to people's homes because "it maximized our chances of getting them to talk."

Meanwhile, the *Journal* tried to cultivate additional sources in the pits — sometimes in unusual ways. In late February the *Journal* sent a "confidential survey" on trading practices to almost 2,000 traders. The exchanges did not authorize the survey, and the response rate was only 15 percent. Nonetheless, the paper concluded that, as an April 18 headline put it, **VIOLATIONS ARE COMMON AT CHICAGO MERC, POLL SAYS**.

Tom W. Smith, of the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center, says that the survey was "pretty severely biased" because of the low response rate and the format of the questionnaire.

The survey was "typical of the high-pressure methods used by the *Journal* at this point," says Yemma, the Merc spokesperson. "One of their reporters, Jeff Bailey, swore at me twice when we wouldn't let him photocopy hundreds of our files. No other news organization acted that way." In response, Bailey says, "To the extent that I pursued this story more aggressively than other reporters, I'm proud of that."

Perhaps the most controversial of the *Journal's* stories was published on April 13. The story, by Bailey and Robert Johnson, alleged that Melanie Kosar, a twenty-five-year-old trader, was "a government informant." The story portrayed Kosar as something of a Jekyll and Hyde: "By day, she trades in the Chicago Board of Trade's Treasury Bond futures pit. But some afternoons,

she sheds her red trading jacket to rendezvous with prosecutors . . . ."

"The article is dead wrong," Kosar says. While she acknowledges answering questions by federal agents who awakened her on the night of January 17, she adds, "It is false to say that I have continued to cooperate with them since then." Kosar also says that *Journal* reporter Bailey persuaded her to be interviewed for the article by deceiving her. "He told me he was going to write a feature story about me because I was one of the few women brokers at the Board of Trade."

Paul Steiger, deputy managing editor of *The Wall Street Journal*, says, "Any suggestion that we misstated our intentions to Kosar is false."

Kosar charges that the *Journal* story "misquoted me or put things I said into the wrong context." A review of the tape recording made of the interview supports her contention. For example, the *Journal* story states: "Asked directly whether she is an informant, she says this is a question she won't answer"; however, the tape indicates that not only was Kosar never asked this question directly, but also that both she and her lawyer made it clear that she was not a "government witness."

Steiger says, "The *Journal* stands by the accuracy of its story."

Kosar says that the *Journal* article had a devastating effect on her life. "I haven't been able to work," she says. "Traders have been so cruel to me that I can't go down there. I lost most of my friends and a lot of money."

The future is more than a little uncertain for Kosar and many of the other traders whose lives have been affected by the news coverage.

Journalists and traders alike now anxiously await the first round of indictments. It is ironic that after months of news stories about the federal probe, the announcement of indictments will be the first official public acknowledgment of its existence. It also will be the first meaningful indication of the actual scope of the alleged wrongdoing. ■

# WHEN MORE MEANS LESS

Notes on the  
new globetrotting,  
single-minded  
crisis chasers

by MICHAEL MASSING

The pack is back. It appeared most recently in Panama, at the time of the presidential election in May. Earlier, it was sighted in El Salvador and Chile, and next February it's due to appear in Nicaragua when that country goes to the polls. The pack consists of hundreds of journalists — American and European, Latin American and Japanese — who descend on a foreign capital at the time of an event, usually an election, that, for whatever reason, has grabbed hold of the world's consciousness. The pack generally begins arriving a week or so before the event, takes over the best hotel in town, roams the city in clamorous clusters, files its dispatches en masse, then heads for the airport as soon as interest in the story wanes — usually a matter of two or three days.

For most such events, the quality of the reporting is inversely proportional to the number of reporters assigned to cover it. Panama is a good example. As the May 7 election approached, hundreds of reporters checked into the deluxe Marriott Hotel in the heart of Panama City. Day after day they churned out their stories, chronicling the blatant fraud of the government, the thuggery of the "Dignity Battalions," the protests of the opposition, the airlifting of American troops. This certainly made for good copy, but after a while it all seemed to run together. One would have expected at least a few reporters to break away and probe some of the underlying elements of the crisis — for instance, the role of the Panama Defense Forces. With 15,000 men, the PDF is the single most powerful actor in Panama, and the Bush administration, seeking a quick exit from the crisis, called on it to undertake a coup against the odious General Noriega. But the PDF itself has a history of corruption and abusive behavior, raising questions about how much democracy it would allow even if Noriega were to leave. Few journalists pursued the matter, however. Doing so would violate a principal rule of the pack — that all the journalists in town should chase the same predictable stories.

I feel like an authority on the pack, having joined one in El Salvador at the time of its March 19 election. Normally

the country is covered by a small band of newspaper correspondents, wire-service reporters, and stringers. In the days leading up to the election, however, reporters came streaming in from Paris and Madrid, Mexico City and São Paulo, Tokyo, Toronto, Houston, and St. Petersburg. Day and night the lobby of the Camino Real Hotel bustled with veteran war correspondents, aspiring young free-lancers, photographers with bulging vest pockets, and TV cameramen with high-tech hardware. ABC, CBS, and NBC each had a full crew in town, and a *Nightline* team was preparing a live feed. A writer for *The New Yorker* came provisioned with a surfboard for use during the week's duller moments. In all, 784 reporters registered with the armed forces' press office.

El Salvador is a tiny country — no larger than Massachusetts — and with so many journalists present it was hard to stay out of one another's way. Press conferences were usually mobbed, and at interviews it was sometimes necessary to wait in line. One night I sat in a lovely house in an affluent district of San Salvador, watching the TV news with an American photographer recently in from Managua. Suddenly there was a knock on the door, and the photographer's assistant breathlessly announced that leftist guerrillas had just ambushed a security



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patrol, killing a policeman. The photographer immediately jumped up and grabbed his equipment, and together we rushed out the door and into the assistant's waiting car.

It was crucial that we get to the scene of the crime before the body was moved. The incident had occurred only two miles away, but the guerrillas had knocked out the electricity in the area and the traffic lights were out, causing a massive tie-up. Unruffled, the assistant drove on, lurching maniacally from lane to lane, depositing us at the ambush site in less than ten minutes. Salvadoran soldiers had cordoned off the area, but they waved us through when we flashed our credentials. Sensing an exclusive, we hurriedly parked the car, got out, and ran toward a knot of blinking police cars. We had gone only a few paces, however, before we met a mini-battalion of photographers and TV cameramen, all heading back from the site. "Don't bother," one of the photographers glumly called out. "The body's gone." We joined the dejected procession back to the cars. No body, no story.

One day, in an effort to gauge the mood in the countryside, I traveled to the town of San José de Villanueva, located in the south-central part of the country. Actually, I wasn't alone. There was also a reporter for the New Orleans

*Times-Picayune*. And a reporter for *The Tampa Tribune*. And a MacArthur Fellow writing a book about Latin America. And two photographers. And two drivers. We hoped to interview San José's mayor, who had recently rejected a guerrilla demand that he resign. Already eight other Salvadoran mayors had been executed for exhibiting similar defiance. It sounded like a good story. At 10:30 in the morning our two-car caravan pulled out of the Camino Real parking lot, and forty minutes later we were in the town's dusty plaza.

The mayor wasn't in; an assistant volunteered to find him. He showed up ten minutes later. Ricardo Rodriguez Lopez flashed a look of disbelief at the six *gringos* on his doorstep, but he quickly regained his composure and, with an air of sudden self-importance, waved us into his modest office. On the wall hung a large poster urging people to vote for the right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA), of which Rodriguez was a member. For the next half hour the young mayor held a mini-press conference, soberly fielding our questions about the effects of the war, the country's economic problems, the likely outcome of the election. Mayor Rodriguez assured us that ARENA would win an overwhelming majority of San José's votes.

Naturally, as good reporters, we viewed the mayor's assertion with some skepticism. Eager to test it, we took our leave and set out into the blinding sunshine, looking for people to interview. We began walking up and down San José's unpaved streets and, behaving as if this were Omaha or Toledo, knocked on people's doors and asked what they thought about the election. We talked with three young mothers holding squirming children, a toothless peasant, a pious foreman at a church under construction, and the sweating proprietor of a small shop where we stopped for drinks. The conversations all followed the same unvarying pattern. Were they going to vote? Yes. Who were they going to vote for? They weren't sure. Would the election help to end the war? Maybe. Everyone was very polite — and completely noncommittal.

It was hard to blame them. Over the last nine years, more than 70,000 people have been killed in El Salvador, most of them civilians targeted for political reasons. Most Salvadoran *campesinos* will not talk openly with their neighbors, much less a group of Americans traipsing around with notepads and tape recorders. After three frustrating hours, we decided to pack it in and return to the capital. Only the photographers were happy. They had spent the afternoon down by a river on the edge of town, photographing a group of women washing their clothes. "It was just like something out of *National Geographic*!" one of them said, excitedly.

Election day dawned to the sound of bombs and machine-gun fire going off around San Salvador. The guerrillas had announced their intention to disrupt the voting, and radio broadcasts were filled with reports of rebel attacks throughout the country. To keep voters from getting to the polls, the guerrillas had declared a transportation strike, threatening to firebomb any vehicle found on the road. Luckily, press cars were exempt, and all journalists had taped the letters "TV" on their windshields — a sort of safe-conduct pass respected by both sides.

I spent the day in San Salvador, driving around with a handful of journalists and human-rights workers. The streets were crowded with thousands of rifle-toting soldiers. American-supplied Huey helicopters buzzed across the sky, rush-



**Death in El Salvador:** Roberto Navas of Reuters, whose funeral is shown here, was one of three journalists killed within twenty-four hours this March.

ing to confront guerrilla troops as they launched attacks. For all the fighting, the election seemed to be going relatively smoothly. At one of the polling places we visited, in the working-class district of Soyapango, voting had been delayed because of late-arriving ballot boxes, but the people in line seemed determined to wait. "We all hope the election will bring peace," I was told by one middle-aged woman waiting to vote.

I heard that sentiment expressed time and again on election day. This was the sixth time that Salvadorans had gone to the polls since 1982. During that period, more than 40,000 people had been killed, with few families having escaped the bloodshed. "Peace" was on everyone's lips. Yet the war was actually intensifying and there was little indication that this election would be any more successful than the previous ones in helping to end the conflict. Unfortunately, few reporters paused to ponder this. Doing so would have required looking at the origins of the war, the strategy of the guerrillas, the internal makeup of the military, and the weaknesses of the government. Most of the reporters in town, however, had been sent to cover one particular event — the election — and so they concentrated on things like turnout, fraud, and vote counts. And, on all those scores, the system seemed to be functioning reasonably well.

The one major exception, strangely, involved the press itself. In a single twenty-four-hour period, three journalists were shot and killed. In one incident, occurring the night before the election, two Salvadoran photographers working for Reuters, Roberto Navas and Luis Galdamez, were stopped at a military roadblock while riding home from work on a motorcycle. After they showed their press credentials, an argument broke out, but the two were allowed to proceed. Before they got very far, though, a soldier opened fire. Navas was killed; Galdamez, seriously wounded.

On election day itself, Mauricio Pineda, a soundman for a Salvadoran TV station, died when the van in which he was riding — clearly marked PRENSA — was sprayed by soldiers' rifle fire. Also on election day, Dutch cameraman Cornel Lagrouw was shot in the chest while filming a battle between the army and guerrillas in the province of Usu-

lután, east of San Salvador. Fellow journalists rushed Lagrouw into a station wagon and set off for a nearby hospital, but a military helicopter followed them and began shooting, delaying their progress for close to an hour. By the time they reached the hospital, Lagrouw was dead.

These events sent a shock wave through the press corps. On the second floor of the Camino Real, where many foreign news organizations maintained offices, reporters walked about in a daze. In the late afternoon, Bill Gentile, an American photographer who had been in the station wagon with Lagrouw, appeared in the hotel, and a crowd of journalists gathered around as he described diving from the vehicle and taking cover from the attacking helicopter. His face and clothes were still streaked with dirt.

**D**espite the wrenching nature of these developments, there were still deadlines to meet. Opinion was mixed about how much weight to assign the deaths of the journalists. One news-weekly correspondent I talked with cautioned against getting carried away. With 70,000 victims in the war, he argued, singling out these three cases would be inappropriate, a case of professional favoritism. Most reporters disagreed. This election, like earlier ones, was being touted as evidence of El Salvador's growing democratization; certainly the shooting of journalists by soldiers raised questions about how much progress had been made. In the end, most American correspondents mentioned the shootings in the leads of their election-day stories.

The real question was, how much follow-up would there be? There remained much to be investigated about the three incidents. Were they coincidental or part of a broader pattern? Had someone ordered the attacks or were they simply the acts of trigger-happy soldiers? Was the military conducting a serious investigation? Had anyone been arrested? Most important of all, what did these events portend for the future safety of reporters covering the war? ARENA, a party well known for its hostility toward the press, was about to take office. Did this mark the beginning of a more perilous time for journalists based in El Salvador?

These matters were aired in an ex-

traordinary exchange held between members of the military and the press corps a few days after the election. The army, obviously concerned about its image, summoned reporters to a briefing at its headquarters, a sprawling, faded complex on the southern edge of the capital. About 120 local and foreign journalists showed up to talk with Defense Minister Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova and Chief of Staff René Emilio Ponce. General Vides, a courteous man known for his skill at handling foreigners, began by offering the journalists his "greatest condolences." "We're very proud of how we behaved during the election" he said. "Nonetheless, the news about the reporters made us very sad." Noting his "true desire to prevent these things in the future," the general opened the floor for comments.

For more than an hour the journalists vented their complaints. Some became quite vehement, asserting that these killings were the logical outgrowth of the tensions that had been building between the military and the press. "There's been a change in attitude among soldiers," one veteran Latin American journalist angrily declared. "We felt unusual tension [in the weeks prior to the election]. Soldiers were stopping our cars regularly and doing other things that had never happened before. We ask that you communicate with your troops and tell them to regard us as friends, not enemies." Vides, who had been taking notes, paused to express his sincere intention of restoring good relations. "We know what the death of a journalist in this country means," the defense minister said, his voice resonant with understanding. In Nicaragua, he added, such an event had helped bring about "the fall of a government" — a reference to the 1979 shooting of ABC correspondent Bill Stewart by Somoza's National Guard. "We have a genuine desire to investigate these matters," the defense minister assured us.

As it turned out, Vides had little to worry about. By the end of the week, most foreign journalists had left town. The story of the three killings rapidly faded, and few American newspapers bothered to pursue it. El Salvador was becoming old news. After all, the election in Panama was just around the corner. The pack had to get ready. ■

# RUNNING THE NEW, 'IMPROVED' **FOIA** OBSTACLE COURSE

**W**hen reporter Donald Goldberg began investigating what the U.S. government knew about the billions in gold bullion Ferdinand Marcos supposedly had left buried somewhere in the Phillipines, he filed a Freedom of Information Act request with the State Department and a half dozen other federal agencies.

Goldberg knew that the cost of searching, editing, and photocopying the relevant documents could take government officials many hours and cost hundreds of dollars. But as a senior staff associate for the syndicated Jack Anderson column and an experienced user of the Freedom of Information Act, Goldberg also knew he was entitled to a fee waiver as a journalist. The act had been amended in 1986 to ensure just that.

So Goldberg was somewhat annoyed when he received a letter from the State Department in June 1987 — nearly four

months after asking for the information and a fee waiver — that rejected his request to have all search and photocopying fees dropped. "Unfortunately it does not appear the processing of your request will primarily benefit the general public," the letter states, "since there is no evidence of a general public interest in the subject matter."

"I thought it was ludicrous they were trying to substitute their news judgment for that of a reporter," Goldberg says. When stories about the legendary hidden war booty began to appear in national magazines and newspapers just a month after he received the State Department ruling, he became downright angry.

After formally appealing the denial and doing "some screaming" over the

telephone, Goldberg was granted a fee waiver. A year later he received an envelope from the State Department, but the only enclosure was a copy of a useless embassy cable that alluded to a recent news item about the gold. Goldberg, who for two years worked as an investigator for a congressional subcommittee that, ironically, oversees FOIA matters for all federal agencies, sees a pattern in the way some government officials handle reporters' requests. "It's their policy to deny fee waivers regardless of merit, and it's up to you to get that decision overturned," he says.

Goldberg's troubles were not just a fluke. Daily reporters, free-lance journalists, book authors, and scholars charge that they routinely are being denied fee waivers — and thus sometimes priced out of obtaining access to important government documents — under the FOIA changes that took effect in April 1987. These ostensibly technical changes in wording, they say, have given Justice Department lawyers and

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*James Popkin is a free-lance reporter who lives in Washington, D.C.*



CJIR/Niculae Asciu

## The CIA in the editor's seat

As managing editor of the Addison County, Vermont, *Independent*, a twice-weekly newspaper with some 7,500 paid subscribers, Tim Peek believes that "you take care of your own backyard and you do it vigorously." In 1987 he set out to investigate a rumor that Middlebury College, Addison County's second-largest employer and one of the nation's top private schools, had ties to the CIA.

Peek wrote to the CIA and two other federal agencies, requesting information on government recruiting programs at Middlebury and on any other intelligence-gathering operations conducted there. Although he knew that journalists usually receive fee waivers, he offered to pay up to \$40 for search and copying costs.

Peek's request for a waiver of some fees was denied. The CIA official who signed the letter was blunt in his reasoning: "Although you are an editor of the

Addison Press [sic], the information you seek does not meet the regulatory requirement of current events or information that would be of current interest to the general public. Therefore, you will be responsible for search review and reproduction fees."

The estimated fee for a search that the CIA admitted might turn up nothing was \$600. For Peek, the quest for relevant CIA information was over. "I don't have the money to spend to either pay for it or fight them on it," he says. "They would never do this to *The New York Times* or *The Boston Globe*. They have a different standard for smaller newspapers who can't challenge them."

After a Senate oversight hearing on the FOIA held last summer by Vermont Senator Patrick Leahy, the CIA admitted that it had erred in misjudging public interest in the subject matter and in mistaking Peek for an employee of a "commercial publishing company." Peek is

not convinced of their honesty. "I sent this request in on our newspaper stationery and when I signed it down below it said, 'Tim Peek, Editor,'" he says.

Peek says it is clear that the CIA is making editorial decisions to determine who merits a fee waiver: "They are reaching into the newsroom to say this is something the public should know about. That's a judgment for an editor to make, not a bureaucrat."

Although he did not appeal the decision and thus has not received any information from the CIA, Peek was successful in obtaining about thirty pages of free documents from the National Security Agency. The information, which took a year to arrive, included recruiters' reports and notes on what restaurants they had frequented while visiting Middlebury. The experience was not a total loss, Peek says, adding, "We're going to do a little sidebar on top-secret restaurant reviews."

federal officials license to justify subverting the original intent of the act.

"The 1986 amendments gave the government an editorial decision over the material it was releasing when assigning fee waivers," says Angus Mackenzie, co-director of the Freedom of Information Project for the San Francisco-based Center for Investigative Reporting. "The government is now in the business of judging the news that's going to make it look bad."

Created by Congress in 1966 to codify what is often referred to as the people's

right to know, the Freedom of Information Act stands alone as the legal basis for public access to records of federal agencies. Although sparingly used by reporters in its early years, the FOIA has become an indispensable tool for investigative journalists. In recent years, for example, reporters have used the act to uncover poor management practices at NASA which contributed to the safety problems that culminated in the deadly Challenger explosion, covert FBI investigations of distinguished American authors, including Ernest Hemingway and

John Steinbeck, and links between an atomic bomb facility in Hanford, Washington, and increased cancer rates among plant workers.

Alternately hailed as the key to open government and denounced as a hindrance to law enforcement efforts and executive privilege, the FOIA has withstood neglect, attack, and fierce national mood swings for twenty-three years. Many thought the act would also survive the Reagan era intact. That was before the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 came along.



Although lawmakers in both the House and the Senate had been attempting to amend the FOIA since the start of Reagan's first term in office, they were unable to settle their differences. Senator Orrin Hatch forced the issue by tacking a key FOIA amendment onto the must-pass 1986 drug law that declared certain organized-crime files off limits to FOIA requesters.

The compromise bill that passed Congress in October 1986 — the first major reform of the act since Watergate days — broadened the law-enforcement exemptions, increasing the authority of the federal agencies to withhold documents that "could reasonably be expected to interfere with enforcement proceedings." In addition, the revised bill created three distinct categories of information users and established higher fees for commercial requesters than for anyone else. For reporters, the revisions brought both good and bad. On the positive side, they guarantee anyone who qualifies as a "representative of the news media" free document-search time and at least 100 pages for free. They also require agencies to waive or reduce duplication fees if requesters meet a strict public-interest standard.

On the negative side is the new public-interest test, and the Justice Department's interpretation of it. Prior to the amendments, requesters could apply for waivers if disclosure of the information would serve the public good and if the requester intended to disseminate it to the public. Now the requester must show that disclosure of the information is "likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of the government and is not

## Good news is no news

Stewart Harris, a reporter for the Jack Anderson column, routinely sends FOIA requests to government agencies after prominent people have died. Frequently his gambles pay off, resulting in stories about previously secret government dossiers on such celebrities as James Cagney and Andy Warhol. Lately, however, Harris has been stonewalled twice by the latest FOIA tactic: the denial of fee waivers if the files are deemed to be "favorable."

Harris received the first of this new type of rejection letter in January 1988, when the FBI ruled against a fee waiver for government records on late Steelworkers union leader I.W. Abel on the ground that the file consisted of three routine background investigations that "were favorable and did not uncover in-

primarily in the commercial interest of the requester."

The new language may not sound so daunting. But when the Justice Department interpreted the changes as narrowly as possible in its surprise April 1987 guidelines — neither required by law nor requested by Congress — many FOIA officials became convinced that they had a legal right to make subjective decisions about what constitutes news. The guidelines outline new criteria that agencies should consider before granting fee waivers. Issued by Assistant Attorney General Stephen J. Markman, the memorandum makes clear that changes are afoot. Disclosures granted under the previous standard, he wrote, "will not sat-

formation about Mr. Abel that was not already publicly known." Harris received a similar FBI rejection letter in February 1988 concerning the files of deceased presidential economic adviser and Federal Reserve Board chairman Arthur F. Burns.

Harris criticizes the FBI for assuming that a "favorable" report is less newsworthy than a negative one: "I don't see why an evaluation should be based on the favorable or negative nature of information. That's a subjective opinion entirely."

Sometimes, he adds, reading even the most glowing of reports reveals the methods used by the government to track individuals: "Often the internal machinations [of file collection] are as interesting as the content itself."

isfy the standard as revised."

All federal agencies have adopted guidelines drawn up by the Office of Management and Budget, the agency Congress had initially instructed to formulate such guidelines. Some agencies, however, have chosen to follow a ruling on fee waivers issued by the Justice Department, while others, such as the Department of Health and Human Services, have crafted their own criteria regarding fee waivers.

The Justice guidelines create problems for scholars and book authors by insisting that "Bare assertions by requesters that they are 'researchers' or 'have plans to author a book' are insufficient evidence that a contribution to un-



## The high price of information

Like many other reporters, Dave Davis, special projects reporter at the Dayton, Ohio, *Daily News*, has been charged for search fees or persuaded not to pursue FOIA requests by government officials armed with the prospect of hefty bills. In July 1987, for example, after requesting records from the Immigration and Naturalization Service on a bogus Saudi prince involved in a questionable West Virginia financial deal, Davis was informed he would have to pay up to \$14 an hour for search fees.

"Because I didn't have his date of birth, [the INS official] said it's going to be very expensive to look it up," re-

calls Davis, who at the time was a reporter for the Charleston, West Virginia, *Gazette*. "It's prohibitive. At most newspapers that will cause an editor to say, 'Let's do it some other way.' "

Davis, who has filed 108 FOIA requests since 1987, says he has been granted a fee waiver only once. Actual charges, or the threat of being billed for public information, he adds, sometimes determine which stories he will pursue: "The money is a factor. Every month I have to explain to my bosses how much I've spent and why, and they make decisions based on my judgment. As a reporter, you have to pick your battles."

derstanding by the general public will ultimately result from a disclosure." With cautionary language like that, it is no wonder that the Air Force classified a college professor as a commercial FOIA user because he was paid to teach.

The OMB guidelines provide little solace. On the issue of free-lance journalists, for example, they state that fee waivers should be issued to those who "demonstrate a solid basis for expecting publication." Publication contracts are

mentioned as the "clearest proof" that one expects to be published. This could pose problems to free-lancers who work on speculation.

Harry Hammitt, editor of *Access Reports*, a bi-weekly newsletter that tracks FOIA developments, says that there could be trouble ahead for free-lancers and other writers. "Agencies that tended to be a little obstreperous before the '86 amendments will make you dot your *i*'s and cross your *t*'s now. They know that

once they categorize you as a journalist, they've given away the keys," Hammitt says.

"This is a calculated, coordinated attempt by the Department of Justice and the Office of Management and Budget to completely invert the wishes of Congress," says Scott Armstrong, executive director of the National Security Archive and a former *Washington Post* investigative reporter who wrote *The Brethren* with Bob Woodward.

"It's a codification of the most reactionary administration control," adds Mackenzie of the Center for Investigative Reporting. Mackenzie believes that the changes will result in years of government abuses that will force journalists to head back to court in attempts to define what the new law means.

The FOIA amendments are still relatively new, and the time it takes federal officials to become acclimated to all the act's changes is exacerbating the oldest FOIA problem around: the delay in responding to requests. A recent investigation of the State Department's FOIA office, for example, revealed that half of all requests received by the agency in the first six months of 1986 took longer than a year to process. As of April 23 of this year there was a backlog of 3,623 requests. ■



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# JUDGMENT CALL

## Do reporters have a right to march?

by STEPHANIE SAUL

In nearly twenty years of writing about abortion for *The New York Times*, Linda Greenhouse frequently thought about taking a public stand on the issue. After what she calls "careful consideration," she finally acted, joining thousands of marchers in a Washington demonstration. Their aim: to fend off a reversal or revision of the Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion.

Greenhouse was by no means the only journalist who took part in the April 9 march. Dozens of reporters and editors were there, most of them without the knowledge or approval of their employers. But Greenhouse's participation caused the most controversy because she covers the Supreme Court for the country's most prestigious newspaper. And her dual role has sparked a renewed debate over an old ethical question: To what extent may a journalist become involved in public controversies?

Many editors believed that the issue had been resolved after the 1960s and early '70s, when reporters found it difficult to remain neutral on civil rights and Vietnam and management drew up guidelines prohibiting political activism. Warren Hoge, the *Times*'s assistant managing editor, for instance, says he was surprised when the issue came up again "because I just assume that reporters realize that you forfeit the right to take part in a political demonstration." Now, editors are busy re-educating their staffs, particularly the younger members. "What's been noted here is that there's a generation gap, with younger reporters not seeing this as an issue and older reporters thinking it is terribly obvious," says Boyce Rensber-

ger, science editor of *The Washington Post*.

After the word filtered down that some *Post* reporters and editors had marched, managing editor Leonard Downie, Jr., and executive editor Benjamin C. Bradlee issued a memo ordering anyone who had participated in the march to refrain from further coverage of the abortion debate. Then Downie began a series of ethics discussions with his staff. At some other newspapers, editors issued memos restating or redefining policies regarding political activism. And during an interview for a Nieman Fellowship, *Chicago Tribune* reporter Ann Marie Lipinski was pressed on the ethical dilemma by Harvard professor Helen Vendler. "She was very fascinated with where reporters draw the line," says Lipinski, who believes strongly that reporters should avoid community activism. "She was pressing me on various gradations of where reporters draw the line." (Lipinski was selected for this fall's Nieman class.)

Vendler's question is central to preserving public trust in the media. But, despite its importance, the question has never been definitively resolved.

There seems to be a consensus that it's improper to participate in a public controversy while covering it. Several journalists who cover the high court with Greenhouse were stunned by her action. "There's no way you can explain those two acts, one journalistic and one political, as compatible," says the Baltimore *Sun*'s Supreme Court reporter, Lyle Denniston, who went out of his way to avoid being involved in the demonstration. "On the day of the march, I was sailing on my boat expressly so I wouldn't be associated with it," Denniston says.

Stephanie Saul is a reporter in Newsday's Washington bureau. She did not participate in the April 9 march in Washington.

But Greenhouse's case is more clear-cut than most. Generally, journalists' views on the issue fall somewhere in between agreeing with the action Greenhouse took and that taken by former NBC president Bob Mulholland. While executive producer of *NBC Nightly News* during the early 1970s, Mulholland quit registering to vote.

"Those were very political times. The Nixon administration was going after journalists. Spiro Agnew was loose in the land," recalls Mulholland, now head of broadcast news at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism. "I wanted no one to be able to accuse me of being unfair."

"I start out with the presumption that a given individual is going to be a professional and try to present both sides of the issue," says Douglas Johnson, the National Right to Life Committee's legislative director. "But it is hard to operate on that presumption if somebody calls you up who you know has been marching outside the Supreme Court to defend *Roe v. Wade*."

Johnson says he believed Greenhouse was an advocate of legalized abortion even before she chose to join the demonstration. But the anti-abortion group, which occasionally monitors speeches made by reporters who cover the abortion issue, doesn't consider Greenhouse's reporting particularly offensive. "Of people who regularly cover abortion issues, whose stories are consistently unbalanced, she would not be on the short list," says Johnson.

For Greenhouse the decision to march was "not a casual act at all. It's the first public act I've engaged in in the twenty-one years I've been at the *Times*," she says.

Greenhouse adds that she would never sign a petition supporting legalized abortion, making a distinction between plac-



Celebrities lead an estimated 300,000 — or 600,000 — pro-choice marchers, including some off-duty journalists.

ing her name on a written document and marching in a mass demonstration, which she views as an anonymous act. "I honestly thought it was just a few steps removed from the privacy of the voting booth," she says. "It's not as if I was marching under a banner that said 'New York Times Reporter for Choice.' I was just another woman in blue jeans and a down jacket."

"We don't have anonymity," Hoge counters. "I don't have it. Linda Greenhouse doesn't have it."

Those who sympathize with Greenhouse's position say that a professional journalist is capable of setting aside his or her personal beliefs while sitting down to type a story, particularly when covering a formally structured event like the presentation of oral arguments in a court case.

"I think reporters are capable of separating their personal views from what they report," says Tom Goldstein, a former *Times* reporter who is now dean of

the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California at Berkeley.

And many journalists who believe a reporter should not participate in a public controversy while covering related stories have no problem with participating in such an event while not covering the issue. *New York Newsday* reporter Alexis Jetter says she felt free to march because she does not cover abortion-related stories.

Another *Newsday* employee, former state editor Bob Keeler, used the same rationale when he participated in a couple of anti-abortion marches in Washington during the mid-1970s: "At that time, I was covering county government and not writing regularly about abortion. So I decided that my presence among thousands of other people would not affect my ability to be fair or the appearance of my ability to be fair." Later, however, when Keeler became Albany bureau chief and was covering abortion-related issues for *Newsday*, he stopped

participating in such marches.

Despite his willingness to participate in a mass demonstration, Keeler registers to vote as an independent so as not to affiliate with a political party.

Others believe that any political expression should be taboo for a journalist. "We have spent the last fifty years trying to achieve a professional status in our society in which we approach the events we write about with what we hope would be the disinterestedness of a scientist," says *Post* ombudsman Richard Harwood. "That's impossible and I recognize it, but that's the attitude of mind we should have and that's the goal we should be after. I don't care if it's an abortion march or writing speeches on the side."

The Society of Professional Journalists' statement on ethics says that "secondary employment, political involvement, holding public office, and service in community organizations should be avoided if it compromises the integrity

of journalists and their employers."

Newspaper policies vary.

- *The Philadelphia Inquirer's* detailed policy, adopted in 1977, says that staff members "should be careful not to offend or give the wrong impressions to members of the public by blatantly espousing or expressing viewpoints on public issues." The policy statement goes on to prohibit staff members from wearing antiwar buttons, signing petitions, or otherwise identifying themselves with public issues.

Gene Foreman, the *Inquirer's* managing editor, says he can recall only one incident in which the policy had been violated — when a film critic signed a petition complaining about the condition of a theater. Foreman, who says he has heard that at least one member of the *Inquirer* staff participated in the abortion march, adds, "At every opportunity, we're pointing out that our policy is quite clear on the subject."

- *The Washington Post* has a seven-page standards and ethics statement,

written in the 1970s by Bradlee. "*Washington Post* reporters and editors are pledged to approach every assignment with the fairness of open minds and without prior judgment," it says. In another section it states: "We avoid active involvement in any partisan causes — politics, community affairs, social action, demonstrations — that could compromise or seem to compromise our ability to report and edit fairly." It also urges reporters to "make every effort to remain in the audience, to stay off the stage, to report the news, not to make the news."

In enforcing the policy, the *Post* has prohibited its reporters from appearing on Voice of America programs. "We don't want anyone in a foreign land to think we're agents of the government," Harwood explains. The newspaper has also prevented its employees from serving on a school board. And op-ed pieces by reporters must not take a stand on an issue, according to Downie.

- *The Times's* policy requires that "staff members avoid employment or any other undertaking, obligation, relationship, or investment that creates or appears to create a conflict of interest with their professional work for the *Times* or otherwise compromises the *Times's* independence and reputation."

*The Times's* policy contains nothing specific about participating in marches. "Maybe no one thought it would ever come up," Hoge says.

**S**o far, it appears that no one at any newspaper has been officially disciplined for participating. Greenhouse, who says she didn't think she was violating *Times* policy when she took part in the march, remains the newspaper's Supreme Court reporter. Just weeks after the demonstration she resumed the role of an observer, covering oral arguments in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, the abortion case before the court this year.

"It's just a force of habit that when you sit down to write, you're acting as a *Times* reporter and not as a pro-choice activist," says Greenhouse, who believes that, despite her personal opinions, she can write stories "straight down the middle."

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# BOOKS

## The crowd around Tawana

### Unholy Alliances: Working the Tawana Brawley Story

by Mike Taibbi and Anna Sims-Phillips  
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 375 pp.  
\$18.95

by SAMUEL G. FREEDMAN

Race relations in New York City were dangerously volatile well before the November 1987 day when a sixteen-year-old black girl named Tawana Brawley was discovered smeared with dog feces and marked with the words "KKK" and "nigger," allegedly the handiwork of a gang of white men, including a police officer, who had abducted and raped her. In the preceding five years, several blacks, ranging from a prep school student to an emotionally disturbed grandmother, had been slain in confrontations with police, who were in each case exonerated; Bernhard Goetz had shot four black teenagers he contended were about to rob him, and had been acquitted of the most serious criminal charges against him; and a mob of white youths had set upon three blacks in the Howard Beach section of Queens, chasing one onto a parkway, where he was fatally struck by a car.

It hardly mattered that the Brawley case emerged ninety miles from New York City, in the Hudson River hamlet of Wappingers Falls. With so many miserable precursors, the case instantly activated the city's black rage, white guilt, and media pursuit. When it became increasingly evident over the following year that Brawley had not been raped or kidnapped by white men wearing badges or by anyone else, and that

Samuel G. Freedman is a former reporter for The New York Times, where he wrote frequently on race relations. He is now completing a book about one year in an inner-city high school.

she had quite possibly defiled herself to escape parental punishment for running away from home, the white guilt subsided but the black rage and media pursuit only intensified.

Both were orchestrated by the activist lawyers Alton Maddox and C. Vernon Mason and most especially by the Reverend Al Sharpton, who improvised both unsupported allegations and telegenic demonstrations with the twisted brilliance of a mythological trickster. That he was peddling a fatuous story seemed largely irrelevant to a black population and leadership which, it appeared, did not need to believe him to derive satisfaction from his ability to reduce powerful whites to apoplexy.

Mike Taibbi and Anna Sims-Phillips, whose reports for television station WCBS in New York consistently revealed the Reverend Sharpton's deceptions, have undertaken an enormous task in trying to explain and unravel the phenomenon of the Brawley affair. To their credit, they provide far more than a sim-

ple narrative of the case and their role in reporting it. They raise large and troubling questions about the manipulation of the media by newsmakers, about the pressures of racial loyalty on black journalists, and about the black community's distrust for what it perceives as "the white media." Taibbi and Sims-Phillips, however, prove more skilled at raising the questions than at answering them.

I do not think they lack the requisite insight, for there are moments of real perceptiveness in *Unholy Alliances*, but I suspect that in their haste to complete and market their book they deprived themselves of sufficient time to explore their greater concerns. As a result, *Unholy Alliances* satisfies neither as a yarn nor as a piece of media and cultural criticism.

The chief problem with the narrative is that, unlike Woodward and Bernstein in *All The President's Men*, Taibbi and Sims-Phillips did not dominate their story. They produced their first report nearly three months into the affair, and so they cannot fully describe the media's early acceptance of Brawley's account of kidnapping and rape. And while Taibbi and Sims-Phillips collaborated on several notable exclusives that earned them Mason's denunciations as "Mad Dog Mike" and "Aunt Jemima Anna," *The New York Times* and the *Pough-*

Fist upraised, the Reverend Al Sharpton leads a demonstration against CBS. Inset: reporters Taibbi and Sims-Phillips



James Hamilton/The Village Voice



Wide World

*keepsie Journal* were also deconstructing the case in scrupulously detailed articles. The authors, to their credit, mention the *Journal's* and the *Times's* pieces, but primarily as confirmation for their own efforts. Had I not begun *Unholy Alliances* with a good memory of the Brawley affair, I doubt the book would have made clear the admittedly chaotic sequence of events. Nor is the narrative helped by frequent lapses into slang, such as "gumshoeing," "facing the music," and "to the max."

Taibi and Sims-Phillips are capable of better things, as they illustrate in several precise and well-observed sections on the black and Puerto Rican slum in Newburgh, New York, where Brawley may have been carousing during the days she was purportedly being gang-raped. There are also understated, specific descriptions of the negotiations — replete with changes of venue and the hiring of a polygraph expert — leading to the pair's most important exclusive, in which a former associate of Sharpton charged that the Brawley advisers knew

the girl's story was false. The source, Perry McKinnon, attributed to Maddox the statement, "I don't care about no facts."

That boast frames the broader context of *Unholy Alliances*. How is it that the facts would not matter? How is it that black leaders who privately disparaged the Reverend Sharpton only belatedly condemned his handling of the Brawley case? The authors give a convincing answer in a scene recounting Taibi's visit to a church at which Sharpton is issuing what the authors term his "Four Hundred Years of Oppression" speech. They write: "It seemed to Taibi, roaming the balcony and ignoring the hostile stares of the congregants, that it wasn't the lawyers or the details of the Brawley story that moved the people in this place of refuge; it was the recitation of their hurt, the repetition of their expectations, the reminders of their unfinished history that dragged them to their feet time and again . . . ."

But such depth is evident only intermittently. The authors refer to Sims-

Phillips's desire to believe Brawley's story — a desire that loses out to the facts she herself helps uncover — without exploring the extraordinary pressures imposed from without and within on a black reporter.

The book's very thesis, the unintentional collusion between a hungry press corps and the Brawley advisors, also suffers from sparse documentation. I have no argument with the contention that the press "served alternately as their foils or their unwitting allies." But the authors do not provide enough examples that name names and quote from articles or broadcasts. One longs for the chapter-and-verse specificity that Mark Hertsgaard evidenced in *On Bended Knee*, his exploration of press coverage of the Reagan administration.

By raising the right issues, Taibi and Sims-Phillips hold themselves to a higher standard than one would normally apply to a "How-I-Got-That-Story" book. But by racing into print they have harmed their chances of reaching that standard.

## The black press cops out

by GREG HARRIS

Undeniably, the Brawley story was kept alive by the dedicated manipulation of mainstream news media by Tawana Brawley's three advisers: attorneys Alton H. Maddox, Jr., C. Vernon Mason, and the Reverend Al Sharpton. But also at work was the fact that New York City's two major black news outlets — the *Amsterdam News* and radio station WLIB — failed to perform as professional news organizations. Whatever the three advisers said — always undocumented and often obscene — was "reported" as though it was divinely revealed truth.

At the *Amsterdam News*, according to the authors of *Unholy Alliances*, no reporter was ever assigned to visit and talk with people in Dutchess County. At the same time, the paper did carry an editorial by editor-in-chief Wilbert A. Ta-

*Greg Harris was an NBC News correspondent in Vietnam and later a producer on The CBS Evening News. Currently he covers national security for the Amsterdam News.*

tum suggesting that Miss Brawley might have been a victim of voodoo. Tatum published whatever the Brawley advisers said; then he charged "bias" when other news organizations questioned the trio's claims.

One of the more bizarre journalistic incidents in the Brawley affair took place in October when *New York Times* reporter Winston Williams, who was never assigned to the story, sent Tatum a letter accusing the *Times* of "sloppy and vicious" reporting. The letter ran as a "guest editorial" in the *Amsterdam News*. Criticizing a September 27, 1988, *Times* story on the grand jury's investigation, Williams wrote that "The 'by-line' box included reporters who had no hand whatsoever in preparing the story." (Ralph Blumenthal, Fox Butterfield, M. A. Farber, Robert D. McFadden, E. R. Shipp, Don Terry, and Craig Wolff were bylined as reporters; McFadden was credited as the writer.) *Times* assistant managing editor Warren Hoge asked each of the editors responsible for the piece if Williams's charge was true; each of the editors, Hoge says, answered with an "emphatic no."

On April 17, 1989, Williams was fired by Hoge for being "grossly insubordinate" to metro desk editor Brent Staples. (Staples and Williams are black, as are Shipp, now a metro editor, and Terry.) Bill Tatum telephoned me at home and asked me to write the news story on Williams's dismissal. The edition in which my story ran carried Williams's letter as an editorial once again.

The same amateurism was generally true of WLIB, where news director David Lampel gave the Brawley advisers free rein. For example, afternoon talk show host Gary Byrd accepted without question or challenge Mason's charge (made on Byrd's program) that New York State Attorney General Robert Abrams had "masturbated" while looking at a photograph of Tawana Brawley.

Not coincidentally, Byrd appears to be an on-the-air acolyte of both Minister Louis Farrakhan and Libya's Muammar Qaddafi, whom he describes as pillars of "renewed Afrocentricity." Within days after the grand jury documented her hoax, Tawana Brawley underwent a religious experience that propelled her into Farrakhan's Nation of Islam sect.

## Third baseman for the Times

**A Year in the Sun**  
by George Vecsey  
Times Books. 334 pp. \$19.95

by PETER ANDREWS

If a crazy person runs up to a painting in an art gallery and vandalizes it, security guards are expected to take immediate action and hustle the poor unfortunate off either to the police station or to the observation ward. What happens, however, if the vandal turns out to be an artist hacking away at his own work? As its creator, he has the right to make a statement, even an unpleasant one. But shouldn't somebody try to stop him from hurting himself?

I was struck by this minor puzzlement as I finished George Vecsey's latest book, *A Year in the Sun*. These reflections of a big-gun sports columnist for *The New York Times* contain some wonderful stuff. There are enough compelling insights about sportswriting to constitute a set of preliminary notes for an advanced seminar on the craft. Although this is not a sports book pretending to be yet another insider's report, it offers several sharply etched portraits of familiar figures in original settings that make us rethink our feelings about them, which is what good profile writing is all about. At one point, Vecsey remembers his father in a few pages so sweet and touching I wept when I read them. As you would expect from a writer who is paid to offer his thoughts in print four times a week, his book is opinionated and contentious as he holds forth on everything from the natural superiority of soccer to why boxing should be outlawed. As in most sports discussions, it is far more important to start an argument than to settle one.

Sadly, Vecsey's book also suffers from an entirely self-inflicted wound so grievous it is close to mortal. But let me stay with the good stuff for now, because there is much to admire in this professional memoir.

Vecsey describes the way journalists

Peter Andrews writes frequently about sports.

live on the edge of disaster all the time as well as anyone I know. Every writing day, he points out, is "another chance to make a fool of myself." To stretch a sporting analogy a bit, daily reporters, along with a few newsmagazine writers working on tight deadlines, are the third basemen of the media. In an instant, either they come up with the ball or they don't. It may not be art, but, God, it's fun when you make the play.

An old hand in the business (he started by taking down baseball scores for *Newsday* in 1956 while still in college), Vecsey does not make a distinction between sportswriting and any other kind of journalism. He was, for a time, a religion writer for the *Times* and has come to believe that the two beats have a lot in common.

"They both take place on weekends," he writes. "They both involve large gatherings. They both use music and pageantry. They both have their holy places, their shrines. They both have their divinities and their fallen angels, their saints and their sinners."

Indeed, Vecsey, who has a bit of the

look of an Old Testament prophet about him, sometimes seems still to be covering religion rather than sports. He is enormously high-minded and never lets us forget it. When he became a *Times* columnist in 1982, he allowed as how his first mission was to write about subjects he thought were important — "race, drugs, women's sports, labor issues, recreational sports, cheating at colleges." No one dares fault Vecsey's social priorities. However, I suspect they may not be in sync with most of the sporting public, which is content to watch athletes cavorting in the sun or trying to beat each other up for money indoors. Fans do not share Vecsey's eagerness to starch and iron their moral underwear every time they go to a ball game. If Vecsey's sports columns read as if they had shimmied their way over from the editorial page, he is content. "One of the greatest talents in sports journalism," he writes, "has confided to friends that he finds my work 'preachy' at times, and I guess he's right."

When he is not exploring his craft,

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Vecsey creates some acid vignettes of sports idols with their clothes off. He admits he could never warm up to Mickey Mantle because the outfielder used to glare at him, belch, and mutter "fuuuuck" whenever the young Vecsey came by his locker.

My favorite picture, however, is of Vecsey's father, an ink-stained wretch in the best tradition, whose dying words to his son were, "Leave the papers by the bed . . ." My own father, also a newspaperman, died in his hospital room minutes after he had sent his suit out to be dry cleaned on a one-day special because he didn't want to miss whatever the next day's story was going to be.

I have a great deal in common with Vecsey. We both deplore the designated hitter, New York Giants fans, and the fact that the World Series has been tortured into a prime-time television event. I found myself desperately wanting to like him and his book more than I did.

And there's the problem. *New York Times* sportswriters, with a few happy exceptions, are notorious for their fully developed sense of importance. But here Vecsey breaks new ground in the field of self-approbation. On page five, he tells us how he got ready to cover the 1986 Orange Bowl game between Oklahoma and Penn State by listening to a cassette of Jacques Brel, *en français*, to be sure. This is all right. As he says, we all prepare in our own ways. But from there until the end of the book he bombards us with proofs of the refinement of his taste, the discrimination of his palate, the elevation of his ethics, and the superiority of his social consciousness. This kind of snobbery can be fun in a John Simon, who has the mental equipment to pull it off, or a William Buckley, who has some wit to color his discourse, but Vecsey is unremittingly solemn about it. He cannot take in a London show without informing us that, unlike most Americans, who watch only mindless musicals, he goes to the National Theatre to see the classics.

George Vecsey is a good man, a good writer, and a good columnist. If he would stop telling us how good he is and let us discover these qualities for ourselves, he could be better yet.

## Short takes

### Timing — and TV

It has occurred to me (after modest ratiocination) that style is, really, a matter of timing.

It is even so in the matter of the speed of human responses which, indicating spontaneity, communicate integrity. "Is it all right if I bring Flo's sister and her husband along for the weekend?" demands instant assent; the least pause is, to the quick ear, lethal. When such a proposition is posed, the man of style will make one of two decisions, and he must here think with great speed. He will either veto the extra guests, going on to give whatever reason he finds most ingenious; or he will accept them on the spot. Absolutely nothing in between. In between is many other things, defined as lacking in style.

It is so, I think, with language in a television studio, whether written or spoken; as also with that aspect of language on which its effectiveness so heavily relies, namely rhythm. It matters less what exactly you say at a moment of tension than that you say it at just the right moment. Great speed might be necessary, as above; or such delay as suggests painful meditation, as required to ease, console, or inspirit the other person. Style is not a synonym for diplomacy.

*From On the Firing Line, by William F. Buckley, Jr. Random House. 533 pp. \$22.50*

### Beyond the news

A further long day's passage, made mostly on engine because of a slack breeze, brought us to Copenhagen, or, to be more precise, to the great yacht harbor of Skovshoved, north of the city proper. Here there was a two-day stop. Mail was received, full, to be sure, of bad news: neighborhood property problems in Princeton; further attacks on myself and my allegedly wrongheaded views, into which chorus Solzhenitsyn had now entered; misuse of my name by the Moscow correspondent of *The New York Times*, attributing to me a statement of the Committee on East-West Accord which I had never even seen, much less signed. Abruptly yanked back in this manner from the harsh but simple realities of the sea to the unpleasant ones of professional life, I wandered disconsolately about in the great marina, with its forest of indifferent masts. But by evening the trivia of cruising, particularly as a skipper and navigator of sorts, had again enveloped me, and the annoyances of life ashore, about which for the moment one could do so little, faded from consciousness. This, I suppose, is the therapeutic quality of cruising in small sailing craft.

*From Sketches From a Life, by George F. Kennan. Pantheon. 365 pp. \$22.95.*



David Levine



George F. Kennan

## The neo-Nazi and the euphemistic press

In fact, the LaRouche movement's fascist character and its dangerous (non-kook) side were not really difficult to see. As early as 1976-77, recognition that LaRouche had gone fascist could be found in such places as the op-ed page of *The Washington Post*.

If this viewpoint — easily proven by LaRouche's writings, his alliances with ex-Nazis and international neo-fascists, and a simple comparison of his tactics with those of classical fascism — had been adopted and widely publicized by the major media and other opinion makers, LaRouche would have been stopped dead in his tracks in the early 1980s. There would have been no chats with National Security Council officials, no alliance with top Teamsters, no deals with shadowy GOP operatives, no grassroots candidates' movement of significant proportions, no passive sufferance by the Democratic party, and certainly no Illinois primary victories in 1986. All that was needed was for opinion leaders to draw the same clear line they had drawn against the Klan, to name LaRouche for what he really was, to declare his movement beyond the bounds of decency.

The confusion on this point, and the inability to draw a clear line, is best illustrated by the role of the major media and especially the major daily newspapers. . . .

After the 1986 Illinois primary, it was more important than ever to give the public accurate information about LaRouche. At first it appeared that blunt, accurate terms might become acceptable. The media did quote Adlai Stevenson III as calling the LaRouchians neo-Nazis. Senator Moynihan likewise used this designation in a Manhattan speech. Many journalists were aware of the truth, but the major media . . . decided to stick to soft terms that wouldn't disturb anyone (the *Times* went so far as to censor out the forbidden word in its coverage of Moynihan's speech). Some newspapers continued to call LaRouche a "rightist," but conservatives began to object. *The Wall Street Journal* published an editorial suggesting that La-

Rouche was really still left-wing (the evidence it cited was conspiracy theories that actually originated on the right). Suddenly the fact that U.S. and West German ultrarightist networks had nurtured LaRouche and provided him with ideas, money, and allies (not to mention weapons training) for the previous ten years became too controversial to dwell on. Newspapers avoided giving offense to the right by adopting the neutral term "political extremist" or by saying LaRouche had a "mixed" philosophy. *The New York Times* called him "eccentric" and a "conspiracy theorist" while announcing that he somehow defied classification in conventional terms. Meanwhile, most of the media promoted the kook theory, by reminding the public over and over that LaRouche believes

Wide World



Lyndon LaRouche

the Queen of England pushes drugs. The only serious analysis of LaRouche appeared in smaller unorthodox weeklies such as the *Chicago Reader*, the *Boston Phoenix* and *In These Times*. La Rouche watcher Chip Berlet recalled his frustration at the time: "I talked with dozens of reporters. I'd send them LaRouche's writings. Then I'd lead them step by step through it on the phone, to show them it was classic fascism. I'd cite chapter and verse from Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* — how LaRouche fit like a glove. They'd say, 'That's nice,' then turn to their word processors and crank out some quip about Queen Elizabeth."

From Lyndon LaRouche and the  
New American Fascism, by Dennis King.  
Doubleday. 415 pp. \$26.95.

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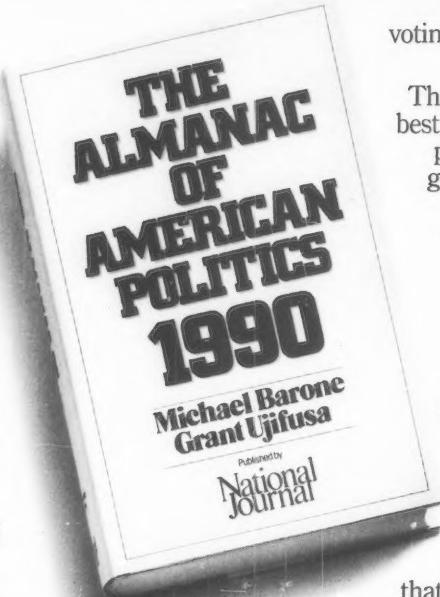
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# LETTERS

## Hail and farewell

The retirement of Spencer Klaw, distinguished editor of the *Columbia Journalism Review*, should not go unremarked. Klaw was a good, tight editor and the magazine he edited was one of the best in the country. I know. I compare. Because my newspaper is so far from "the loop," from anywhere, really, I subscribe to a lot of trade magazines.

Congratulations on a great career, Spencer.

Elizabeth Poston McHarry  
Editor and publisher  
*The Ferndale Enterprise*  
Ferndale, Calif.

## P.S. to Obsession

As mentioned in "Richard Nixon: By the Press Obsessed" (CJR, May/June), some executives of the National Broadcasting Company, I among them, were invited to meet President Nixon in the Oval Office on June 9, 1971. Bruce Oudes reproduces Charles Colson's memorandum describing that meeting, I am sure accurately. The accuracy of Colson's description is something else.

We were treated, among other things, to Mr. Nixon's favorite pose of seeming to be pleasant and understanding about things you knew he hated. For example, stating as a given that television reporters were biased against him, he smiled and said he could understand that; there were younger fellows on the White House staff who were also hard to control. When the talk, which was almost entirely between him and NBC president Julian Goodman, turned to attacks on all of television, he said those had not come from him but from Vice-President Agnew.

Goodman answered, "But you did nothing to gainsay him." At these words, an angry red flush rose slowly from the president's collar to his hairline, but he said nothing. I had never seen that happen with anybody, almost like a film animation, and it is my most vivid recollection of that meeting.

Julian continued, and here I paraphrase from memory, "You can't run a government with memos, it seems to me. Governments are run like football teams, by hand signals, and your signals have been to attack the broadcasters." I suggest there should have been room for this in Colson's memo.

I appreciate your reproducing some of the

memos in Bruce Oudes's book, including this one from Chuck Colson. I could not have written this letter to a book.

REUVEN FRANK  
Senior Fellow  
Gannett Center for Media Studies  
Columbia University  
New York, N.Y.

## Salvos from the Monitor

There's an encouraging story to be told about *The Christian Science Monitor* in the late 1980s. To many of us here who have been closely concerned with preparing for the *Monitor's* future, the article in your March/April issue, "Can the Stripped-down *Monitor* Stay Afloat?" fails to capture it.

The author, Stephen J. Simurda, called us at a particularly busy time, but within a few weeks we were able to arrange meetings for him with key people at the *Monitor*. When it became obvious that his picture of events here was fixed but fragmentary, we invited him to come back for a full day of interviews the following week. He declined, citing deadline pressures.

I'll concentrate on one incorrect statement, because much of the author's thesis depends on it. (His thesis was that there was a basic question of the survival of *The Christian Science Monitor* as a daily paper, and that the editors waged a battle against senior officials to save it.)

In fact, the central issue has been our ability to comprehend, together, the full potential of the *Monitor* to fulfill an expanding, global publishing mission in the decades ahead, using a range of media in which the daily newspaper remains central but not exclusive.

To accomplish this, our total *Monitor* news staff has now grown to an all-time high level (a fact not reported in your article); and a sense of teamwork and synergy rather than division is rapidly building among the newspaper, radio, and television news staffs.

The author says that, in response to management proposals with which she disagreed, editor Katherine Fanning "...protested vigorously to the board of directors and was allowed to create a task force whose job was to evaluate plans for cutting the paper's deficit while maintaining the integrity of the *Monitor*."

This just isn't so, and the reality contradicts much of the author's portrayal. The task force headed by the editor was in fact established *entirely and solely at the initiative and urging of the manager of the publishing society*. It was an integral part of management recommendations to the board of directors of the church via the board of trustees of The Christian Science Publishing Society. It derived from the urgent need for deeper discussion, among the senior editors and managers, of the issues (as well as the great opportunities) facing the *Monitor*. Our various recommendations, to which your author has referred selectively, should be seen in the context of this particular proposal.

It's fair to say that the two boards were reluctant to establish the task force but ultimately did so — entirely at management's request. Simurda asserts that "... it seems clear that powerful figures within the church's publishing arm had for years seriously considered shutting down the *Monitor*." This is said about a management that had not only set up a task force headed by the editor to review managerial findings but had also committed nearly \$20 million to circulation building alone during the very years he describes.

But we were also beginning to build the radio and television news staffs as well, and this was a cause of concern among some of our newspaper staff.

In the final analysis, what happened is this: after several years of planning studies aimed at stimulating open discussion by the whole staff, the boards which hold the final authority and responsibility for *The Christian Science Monitor* made some major course-setting decisions, as their positions require them to do. These decisions are intended to insure a stronger and more relevant daily paper for years to come and vastly broader international reach of the *Monitor's* editorial resources through additional publishing media. They represent a hopeful rather than a fearful view of the *Monitor's* future.

Several of the newspaper's staff disagreed with these decisions. Some resigned, and a few gave indications that any outcome that did not meet their approval would result in a dissident campaign waged in the press and among the church membership. The *Columbia Journalism Review* relied mainly on those who had departed and on selected internal documents they appropriated.

In discussing our new nightly television program, the author says: "the Discovery Channel is available to only 38 million homes." He was factually correct at the time of writing (the correct number is now 40 million), but does he really mean "only"

## LETTERS

when he's speaking of more than 40 percent of all American households? This will be puzzling to many of your readers. He then goes on to claim, incorrectly, that actual audiences have fallen short of our earlier estimates. In fact, the audience, at the end of the fourth month on air, had already begun reaching a million people weekly, well on the way to our goal of 1.5 million weekly by the end of twelve months. And corporate advertisers, like leading TV critics, have given strong endorsement to the new program.

Oddly, Simurda turned to a federal judge in New York with no known qualifications in this field, not to television professionals here or elsewhere, for an assessment of our television broadcasting activities.

In discussing our new monthly magazine, he writes that "the first few issues of the magazine reached roughly 250,000 people." In fact, this was the number of subscribers to the first few issues. The reach was much wider. And the number of subscribers, as of this writing, has passed 280,000 and is still growing.

The real story of what is happening at *The Christian Science Monitor* is a thrilling one. The *Monitor* is now serving millions of people, internationally, who need and are getting a clear, independent, and nonsensational view of what is going on in the world around them. The daily newspaper has a secure future as the centerpiece of a global publishing mission.

JOHN H. HOAGLAND, JR.  
Manager  
The Christian Science Publishing Society  
Boston, Mass.

Stephen J. Simurda replies: *To start at the top, Mr. Hoagland describes my understanding of the situation as "fixed but fragmentary" and implies that I may have been unwilling to let him tell his side of the story. This is not true. I first called the church five weeks before my deadline and was continually put off in my attempts to come to Boston for interviews. My deadline was actually extended one week to accommodate the publishing society. I finally visited the church's headquarters on January 3, the day the new full-color, scaled-down Monitor was introduced.*

*It was a busy day and it soon became clear that no specific interviews had been scheduled for me. I was left to try to catch several people during the day as they had time to speak with me. I met with Hoagland in the morning. After half an hour, during which I had basically stuck to softball questions, I was told that Hoagland had to leave and would meet me again in the afternoon. By*

*afternoon it was clear that he had not liked the tone of some of my questions (such as asking about the number of paid versus free subscribers to World Monitor, the monthly magazine); I was told that he would be busy for the rest of the day. After this visit I made several calls to let a church spokesman know that I was still interested in speaking with Hoagland. He never called. Finally, after my story was submitted, I was invited by the spokesman to return to Boston for a full-day presentation about the publishing society's endeavors. My editors and I decided that a full-day presentation was unnecessary.*

*Next comes the key question of the Monitor's future. Hoagland never denies that there were plans to close the paper. The evidence here is overwhelming. But he implies that the split with top editors came not because of this threat but because of the editors' inability to appreciate the "expanding, global publishing mission" of the publishing society. Suffice it to say that those who have left the Monitor don't quite see it that way. And, while it's true that the total Monitor news staff has grown in trying to fulfill this "mission," the newspaper and radio operations have shrunk substantially while the television and magazine ventures provided the growth.*

*Then we get to the task force and who gets credit for it. Hoagland is correct in saying that he pushed for the creation of a task force. But the one he had in mind would have been run by a publishing society manager, not by the Monitor's then editor, Katherine Fanning. It was Fanning who insisted that she be put in charge of the task force after learning that the Monitor's future was in doubt. Of the \$20 million in circulation-building money spent on the Monitor, it should be noted that this figure represents several years and had dwindled on an annual basis more recently as Hoagland's desire to see the paper expand apparently waned.*

*Many on the Monitor's newspaper staff were unhappy with the changes at the paper, as Hoagland points out. I talked with several of these people and some provided me with documentation to support their opinions. Hoagland, or anyone at the publishing society, had ample opportunity to refute these claims or provide additional documentation to support their beliefs.*

*As for the television show, I must admit that 38 million is a figure not normally modified by the adverb "only." But in this case I was considering a comparison to the estimated 90 million homes that can receive network newscasts. And these homes definitely get the newscasts, while not all of the now 40 million homes that can get the Discovery*

*Channel actually subscribe to it.*

*I turned to Thomas P. Griesa on these and other matters because he is a federal judge, a prominent member of the Christian Science church, and someone who undertook a detailed analysis of the church's finances with the help of the church's treasurer. I also turned to television professionals for an assessment of the church's broadcasting activities. Although their comments did not surface in the published story, their opinions certainly helped shape my understanding of the story. Richard O'Regan, a CBS producer who formerly worked as executive producer of the church's television show, said of the plan to launch the nightly World Monitor newscast: "I thought it was a tremendous misallocation of resources and a very bad plan . . . It made no television sense [and was] essentially drafted by people who yearned to have a daily television program but didn't really understand it." I feel compelled to note that Hoagland had "no known qualifications" in television before coming to *The Christian Science Publishing Society*.*

*Regarding the church's magazine, I clearly state that its circulation figures are impressive. I must correct an error that Hoagland doesn't mention but which was brought up in a separate letter by Susan Paardecamp, circulation director of World Monitor. I referred to a \$5 million promotional campaign for the launch of World Monitor that Paardecamp points out was actually a five-million-piece direct-mail campaign which cost about \$1.5 million. The total promotional budget for the magazine's first year was \$3.5 million.*

*I must take exception to Hoagland's characterization of the real story at *The Christian Science Publishing Society* as "a thrilling one." In the six months from last November to this May, nearly sixty journalists have left *The Christian Science Monitor*. Of these, thirty-one have resigned and another twelve have retired. The rest were laid off. The departures since the appearance of my article include such Monitor fixtures as foreign editor Paul Van Slambrouck and New York bureau chief Victoria Irwin. Sources at the paper say that the departures of several other prominent Monitor writers are expected by year's end.*

*Even more disturbing is the fact that the circulation of the Monitor has dropped from 182,785 on September 30, 1988, to less than 140,000 in June. At the same time, viewership of World Monitor on the Discovery Channel has not grown, according to a spokeswoman at the cable station.*

*And in pursuit of its global publishing mission, *The Christian Science Publishing So-**

society has undertaken some interesting journalistic practices. Several sources report, for example, that the audio from shows being produced for the church's Boston television station is being used on some of the church's radio programs — a money-saving strategy that many believe can lead to bad journalism in both mediums.

If the changes at The Christian Science Publishing Society were not troubling enough to many who worked there for years, the way the changes were implemented continues to be the most disturbing aspect of the move toward a global publishing mission. Internal sources tell of church security guards policing photocopy machines to prevent distribution of documents about the Monitor changes. The controlling tactics did not end there. Church instructors meeting in Boston soon after Fanning's resignation found it virtually impossible to talk openly about what was going on at the Monitor. They were later reminded by letter of the section of the church's manual dealing with excommunication for those "Working Against the Cause."

In 1907, Mark Twain published an unflattering portrait of Mary Baker Eddy in a book titled *Christian Science*. In it he sardonically suggests ways of ensuring the success of the First Church of Christ, Scientist. One is that "the power and authority and capital must be concentrated in the grip of a small . . . clique, with nobody outside privileged to ask questions or find fault." Unfortunately, some church leaders seem to be taking Twain's advice seriously.

#### Answers to a Document

We were disturbed here at 20/20 after your publication of a letter to me from an individual involved in one of our stories ("A Letter to 20/20," CJR, May/June). For some reason, you called this letter a "Document," and printed it on two full pages. The letter made quite serious accusations about the ethics of one of our correspondents, one of our producers, and the program in general. These kinds of accusations cannot be taken lightly, and if they are presented inaccurately and without substantiation, they can do a great deal of harm to those involved. That's exactly what happened.

Through the years we have looked to the *Columbia Journalism Review* as a watchdog for our work as journalists. So I was especially disappointed when the publishing of your "Document" was done in a way that failed to meet even the most minimal standards of journalism. No one bothered to telephone anyone at 20/20 to find out our side

of the story, or even to check the facts or the quotes as they were presented in the letter. In fact, Stone Phillips's remarks were seriously misrepresented. Even the most rudimentary reading of Swimmer-Levine's letter would indicate that it was likely that there would be different points of view regarding the events it described.

As to our side of the story, we did, as you know, receive the same letter you ultimately received. We took it seriously, as we would any such accusation. We immediately conducted an internal inquiry, meeting with the producer and the correspondent in question. After considerable discussion we concluded that both had acted prudently. At that time, as I was preparing to answer Swimmer-Levine's letter, she sent a copy of it to the *Los Angeles Times*. Unlike the *Review*, the *Times* elected to call us to find out both sides of the story and ultimately printed a fair and balanced report.

What you may not understand is that printing such a letter without presenting both sides does damage to our program and its credibility. It also hurts individuals who work very hard and with a great deal of personal introspection and soul searching to act responsibly and ethically in the conduct of their work as journalists. You also did a disservice to your readers, because if they read the so-called Document and assumed it was the truth, they were misinformed, underinformed, and misled.

VICTOR NEUFELD  
Executive producer  
ABC News, 20/20  
New York, N.Y.

Regarding "A Letter to 20/20," several months ago I was working on a story on teenage drug and alcohol dependence, using Pacific Palisades as an example of a community beset by such a problem. One of my sources told me that a letter criticizing my ethics and those of my 20/20 production crew was to be published in the *Review*. I told the person that wasn't possible since the *Review* had not contacted me for comment. You can imagine my surprise when a neighbor told me of the publication of said letter.

The reason I am even bothering to respond is that the airing of "Palisades High School: To Bring the Children Home" marked my tenth anniversary at 20/20 and my resignation from ABC News to build my own production company. Frankly, I am concerned that some colleagues might wonder that Swimmer-Levine's unhappiness had something to do with my leave-taking. It did not.

ABC executives have been in total agreement that our reporting in Pacific Palisades

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## LETTERS

was handled appropriately and in basic journalistic tradition.

Why did CJR give this letter such exposure? Perhaps it was to show how a large media organization was not responding to its mail. However, 20/20 had responded: the saga of Swimmer-Levine's troubles with 20/20 had already been played out in the press. Victor Neufeld, 20/20's executive producer, answered her publicly in Howard Rosenberg's syndicated television column. Swimmer-Levine had contacted Rosenberg shortly after sending the letter to Neufeld. Rosenberg spoke with Swimmer-Levine, Neufeld, and myself. His subsequent article unbiasedly aired our different points of view.

I only wish that the *Review* had followed the same journalistic tradition. Swimmer-Levine has a difficult job, in which her duties include counseling and referring drug- and alcohol-dependent teens. She is in a "hot seat" whenever an unfortunate incident sheds light on the problems of her school and community.

She is certainly entitled to her opinion of how I conduct myself in the field; however, that she should be allowed to cast aspersions without my being given an opportunity to comment is quite shocking. I trust that I was not the only journalist who has voiced surprise that no one at 20/20 had been asked for comment.

JOSEPH F. LOVETT  
President  
Lovett Productions, Inc.  
New York, N.Y.

The editors reply: *Following is the "public answer" that Lovett refers to, as taken from Howard Rosenberg's column in the March 1 Los Angeles Times:*

"She just didn't like what was going on at that party," Neufeld said by phone from New York. "That is not our responsibility." He quoted ABC News guidelines: "Our responsibility is to report and record news events, not to participate in them or seek to influence their outcome."

None of them?

"If we were driving by a burning car, of course we would pull somebody out of it," Lovett said. "But what we were witnessing (at the party) was habitual behavior. They (the youths) were not perceived by me to be in any immediate danger. They were doing what they were normally doing on a Friday night."

Lovett said that he was unaware a cyclist almost went off a cliff and heard no one mention that to Swimmer-Levine: He said he and his crew remained at the party about an hour. "Kids were drinking beers. I smelled marijuana. I watched cocaine being passed. But I'm not a Breathalyzer test. I can't tell you how many were loaded . . .

"The parents know about this kind of behavior,

the school authorities know about this kind of behavior, and the police know about this kind of behavior," Lovett said. "They should have come to stop it, and if they had, we would have filmed that too."

### P.R. or news?

I am writing about the Dart tossed at KICU-TV in your March/April edition. Since you did not call us to see if the *San Jose Mercury News* article was complete, or even if it was correct, let me supply some information you didn't include. Our station did air a series of High Tech interview programs produced by the public relations firm of Regis McKenna.

What you didn't say was that each program was identified as being produced by Regis McKenna. The hostess was identified as a Regis McKenna employee, not a news employee. The program was never referred to by us as a "news segment" or a news series and there was no attempt to make anyone believe it had anything to do with our news department.

Programs, articles, even whole sections of newspapers that are underwritten by a sponsor are common in broadcast and print. The food section of the paper is not put out because the future of the democracy depends on a recipe for zucchini bread. The same applies for automotive and travel sections. The *Mercury News* carries articles in its Sunday arts section on Nevada nightlife that are clearly written by p.r. employees of the casinos. I am enclosing an article from the Perspective section of the *Mercury News* that I believe is an advertisement, although that is never stated and the style and layout are similar to news stories in the paper, including headline, byline, and dateline.

DOUGLAS MCKNIGHT  
News director  
KICU-TV  
San Jose, Calif.

Gloria Cooper replies: *Whether the folks at KICU regarded High Tech Visions as a news segment is beside the point; clearly it was so regarded by the producer and underwriter of the program, Regis McKenna, and, as Regis McKenna presumably hoped, by many viewers as well. As chairman McKenna himself put it in his October 28 announcement of the program's premier, "This special news segment will feature today's technology leaders offering tomorrow's visions."*

*That such deceptions also go on in newspapers (and magazines) will come as no surprise to readers of the Darts and Laurels column. But surely Mr. McKnight does not mean to suggest that two wrongs make a right?*

## Back to Peoria's baby

To reply to the letter by Phil Supple, news director of WEEK-TV, which appeared in the May/June issue of the *Review*: I concede that I failed to inform readers of "The New Year's Baby Who Wasn't News" (CJR, March/April) that the *Peoria Journal Star* also wrongly identified Brooke Rochelle Hamby as the first baby born in Peoria in 1989. But unlike the reporters for television stations WEEK and WMBD, the *Journal Star* reporter working the "baby beat" on New Year's Eve didn't know the truth. The *Journal Star* published its story in good faith, not knowing that the real New Year's baby was born to a fourteen-year-old girl in the back of an ambulance.

The television stations, on the other hand, knew they weren't broadcasting the whole truth. That was the crux of the story. And, remember, the *Journal Star* corrected its error in a subsequent story, something neither television station did.

Toby Eckert  
*Journal Star*  
Peoria, Ill.

## Peddler on the hoof?

A Dart to *Columbia Journalism Review* for peddling advertising (May/June "Special Advertising Section") to media winners of the Pulitzer Prize, the National Magazine Awards, and DuPont-Columbia Awards in Broadcast Journalism alongside pages which, although labeled "Special Advertising Section," ostensibly celebrated these supposedly pristine recognitions of excellence sponsored by Columbia University.

Tacky, tacky.

PENN KIMBALL  
Professor emeritus  
Graduate School of Journalism  
Columbia University  
New York, N.Y.

## Deadline

The editors welcome letters from readers. To be considered for publication in the September/October issue, letters should be received by July 19. Letters are subject to editing for clarity and space.

## Follow-up

• A Tampa court hearing turned into a forum on journalistic ethics when Terry Cole and Michael Shapiro, the former news director and former assistant news director for Channel 10, WTSF-TV, in St. Petersburg, learned the price of taking information from a rival station's computer system (see "The Tampa Media-Espionage Case," CJR, May/June).

Fired from their jobs in March, Cole and Shapiro were formally charged in early May with breaking into the newsroom computer of rival Channel 13, WTFT, in Tampa, fifteen times between November and January. The two also faced one count of conspiracy to break into that computer and the computer of Channel 13's Iowa-based consultant, Frank N. Magid and Associates, and to "use the unlawfully gained materials" in "an effort to gain a competitive advantage."

At their May 19 arraignment, Cole and Shapiro announced that they would plead no contest to the charges, and asked Hillsborough County Circuit Judge Edward H. Ward to get the sentencing over with. "I stepped over the line," Cole told Ward, according to *The Tampa Tribune*. "I've ruined my career. All I can say is that I'm sorry to Channel 10, Channel 13, and the industry."

Ward sentenced each man to five years probation and ordered them to perform 250 hours of community service, including at

least one speech a year to journalists and students planning careers in journalism on the subject of ethics.

Chief assistant state attorney Chris Hoyer, arguing that Cole and Shapiro had betrayed a public trust, urged the judge to find the two guilty. "Others have seen where the line was drawn," he said, according to the *Tribune*. But Ward ruled that if Shapiro and Cole live up to the terms of their sentence, they would have no criminal record.

Channel 10, meanwhile, agreed to pay the state of Florida \$750,000 in settlement, and Hoyer agreed not to pursue a civil suit under the state's racketeering law. More than half the money will go to a victims' assistance program. (Channel 13 says it may also sue, according to the *St. Petersburg Times*.)

• Carlo de Benedetti, the Italian industrialist and financier, strengthened his grip on Italy's press in April when he gained control over the Rome newspaper *La Repubblica* and its sister weekly magazine, *L'Espresso* (see "Italy: When Big Business Shapes the News," CJR, January/February). According to *The New York Times*, newspapers in the hands of de Benedetti and three other industrialists — Giovanni Agnelli, Raul Gardini, and Silvio Berlusconi — now account for more than half of Italy's national daily newspaper circulation of some seven million.

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## Chinese protest mushrooms

*The Tennessean* 4/28/89

### Man shot in jaw in South Side face-off

*The Milwaukee Journal* 6/3/89

### Ex-female sales manager sues dealership

*Valley Daily News* (Kent, Wash.) 7/1/88

### Tests Confirm Excessive Lead At USA Today

*The Washington Post* 4/1/89

## Bishop thanks God for calling

*The Catholic Transcript* 3/31/89

### National Merit Scholarships accused of sex bias

• Death penalty to be sought

*The Daily Item* (Sunbury, Pa.) 5/10/89



Clifford Mitchell made college dean's list with state help

*The Pittsburgh Press* 3/13/89

### Coach sells wife on move to Dayton

*Dayton Daily News* 4/20/89

### Genesee woman wins in dog trial

*Idahonian* (Moscow, Idaho) 5/5/89

### Helping irradiate illiteracy

*Kenton (Ohio) Times* 4/10/89

### Barbeque benefits animals

*The Key West (Fla.) Citizen* 2/10/89



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